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FAMOUS WESTERN

ALL STORIES NEW--NO REPRINTS

Volume 16 August, 1955 Number 4

Featured Novel

OVERLAND PASS ..... Lauran Paine 6
A man doesn't fall down suddenly with his throat cut, when no one is standing near him — yet that was just what had happened to this stranger. And bullets from the brush told Bill Fay that somehow these murders were connected with the mystery of Overland Pass.

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MARIE ANTOINETTE PARK, *Asso. Ed.* CLIFF CAMPBELL, *Asso. Ed.*

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There was a sharp, searing pain in his upper arm; Bill looked down, and saw the handle of a small, pearl-handled knife sticking out of his jacket...

No one had come up to this stranger as he stood at the bar; yet, a moment later, he was lying on the floor with his throat cut. And this was only part of the deadly riddle that Bill Fay had to solve . . .

OVERLAND PASS

Novel Of Satan's Range

by LAURAN PAINE

THERE WASN'T much to it, just the six or eight months old remains of a buckskin mare, an old saddle almost black and curled, and scattered bones—some with ragged cloth or hair attached—of the rider. Bill Fay pushed back his black Stetson and scratched his forehead. Out of this he was supposed to reconstruct the crime, identify the method of extermination and find the killer. He sighed and dismounted. There was a broken limb at his feet, and he picked it up after tying his roan gelding to the tree from which it came.

Bill Fay was a man about forty, average height, muscular and tanned permanently from the untamed elements that played riotous games all year around in his corner of Arizona. He methodically built a cigaret, lit it, and got up a good head of smoke before he went any closer to the pile of refuse that had once been Bud Moon, foreman of the Lightning-seven cow outfit, and his buckskin mare.

Bill poked and pried, with a tightly-compressed mouth and squinted eyes. Being a sheriff had its drawbacks, and this was one of them. As he dug around, he thought back to the times he and Bud had been together. There was that poker game in Channing at Porter's *Red Lily Saloon* when Bud had broken Terry Evans, the hot card-sharp from Chicago. Then there was the time they'd run a saddlehorse race and the buckskin mare had beaten the field, Bill's black included. He smiled bitterly, as if he had a quinine tablet in his mouth, as he thought back to the time he'd arrested Bud and locked him up roaring, killing drunk, the night his wife had disappeared; and how he'd let him out the next morning when she'd returned, after her surrey broke down at her Aunt's place out on the Gila and she'd had to spend the night there.

Bill sighed and tossed the stick aside. The cigaret was just a brown papered stump in his mouth and the little cherry colored end was warm on his face. He tossed it away, too, and went back to his horse. Hell, he couldn't tell whether Bud's horse had fallen and killed them both or if Bud'd been shot. Too late now to tell; the snow of winter and the wash of spring had obliterated any sign there might have been. He mounted and headed for Channing. Bud was the coroner's property now, and he was welcome to him.

Channing had been a Mexican town once. The name had been so long and difficult to pronounce, that the predominant American population had changed it—for no particular reason—to Channing. It was still Mexican in appearance, however, and only time and a lot of it would ever eradicate the low, thick walled stores and the sprawling, dog-infested crudeness of it. Even so, it was home to quite a few people and they liked it the way it was. Sleepy, indifferent, sometimes wild, but always the same—squat, thick walled with its adobe buildings, and residences, and agelessness.

Bill left his horse at the livery barn and went to his office and jail. There was a tall, lean man waiting for him, idly looking through the accumulation of "wanted" posters held casually on a reversed nail near the warped and scarred front door. Bill nodded, hung up his hat, shifted his gun so that it wouldn't gouge him, and dropped wearily into the roundbacked chair behind his desk.

"What can I do fer ya, stranger?"

THE LEAN man faced him and Bill was mildly irritated at himself for not noticing immediately the long scar that ran from the man's left temple almost to his upper lip. Normally he was observant, especially of such a mark which certainly was the product of diligent, hand-guided, knife carving.

"Maybe nothin', Sheriff; maybe a lot."

Bill motioned toward a chair. "Well, I'll do what I can, if it's in my line."

The stranger sat and there was a smug, irritating smile on his face. "It's in your line all right. I come up here to Channing 'cause I heard there was a big cow outfit hereabouts that the foreman got killed on a few months back, an' I reckoned I'd go see about a job a the new foreman."

Lightning-seven. Bill shrugged. "What makes you think findin' ranch foremen is in my line?"

The stranger shrugged and rolled a cigaret. "If the feller was killed, you'd know about it; an', too, before I take the job, I'd like to know why he was killed. I ain't exactly tired of livin', an' don't want to make the same mistakes he made."

Sheriff Fay casually appraised the man, and couldn't place him. That he was no one to fool with was obvious from his bearing, the cold black eyes and the tied-down gun; but there was something else, too, and that was what baffled the sheriff. Not a gunman, and surely not a cowboy. He grunted. Maybe the stranger was what he said he was: a ranch foreman.

"Well, I can't tell you much except that I imagine the outfit you're lookin' for is the Lightnin'-seven. The old foreman, Bud Moon died sometime last fall. 'Matter of fact, I just got back from lookin' over what's left of him, an' I can tell you this much: nobody'll ever know what killed him if all they have to go on is the remains." Bill arose and the stranger sensed the interview was over and got up, too. "Anybody in Channing can tell you how to get to the ranch, but I don't know whether Sawyer, the owner, is out there or not. He's an Easterner, an' don't come out too often."

The tall man thanked Bill indifferently, almost patronizingly, and left. Bill watched him through the open door as he went into the *Red Lily Saloon* and a wry smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. For a man out of a job, and in a hurry to land one, he sure wanted some firewater first; that, too, struck Bill Fay as odd. He pulled on his hat and went out; maybe he was getting barn-sour on the job, trying to read reasons into everything that probably were all wrong.

Bill Fay was a bachelor. He lived in a small house at the edge of town, but he ate with a definite health risk at Wong's, a grimy cafe owned by a sober, seldom-smiling, very meticulous Chinese who could neither speak Eng-

lish sufficiently to be clearly understood, or cook. It was while he was eating that the rush call came. Clem Porter, co-owner with his brother of the *Red Lily Saloon* seemed to erupt through the door. Wong jumped a foot and Bill whirled on his stool.

"Come on Bill, dammit; 'been a killin' the *Lily*."

Bill masticated soberly. Clem's hair was mussed up and his eyes had an odd, out-of-focus look about them. "I didn't hear any shots, Clem."

The saloon man was beside himself with excitement. He almost screamed when he answered. "Gawdalmighty! A man don't have to be *shot* to get killed. Come on!" He whirled and darted back through the door. Bill shrugged apologetically at Wong, who watched through blank, beady eyes, and the sheriff went out.

BILL ENTERED the saloon with the taste of the greasy steak still in his mouth and he saw his second unpleasant sight of the day. There was blood all over the place. Some of it had even splashed on the back-bar mirror. The man was dead—about as dead as a man can be when there's just about no blood left in him. One spurred boot was hooked nonchalantly over the dull brass rail that ran the full length of the dark old bar front.

Bill knelt and studied the body. It was the tall, lean self-styled ranch-foreman who had been in his office earlier; his throat had been cut from ear to ear. Bill got up slowly. He had been a peace officer for twelve years, but this was undoubtedly the messiest spectacle he had ever seen. He looked around and the saloon's inhabitants were standing like a mob of fascinated statues, staring at the thing on the floor. Clem Porter and his brother Al were standing together at the far end of the bar. Bill went over to them.

"What happened, Al?" One look at Clem told him he'd be wasting his time talking to that thoroughly rattled individual.

Al jerked his eyes away from the dead man with an effort and shrugged. "All I can tell you Bill, is that this here hombre come in about an hour ago, had a few drinks, played a little poker, then went back over to the bar an' was drinkin' all by himself—when all of a sudden he toppled over an' there he was with his head damned near cut off."

Bill looked closely at Al. His story didn't make sense; men don't just go walking around until they decide to fall down, and then it turns out that their throats have been cut. He looked back at the corpse, then over to Cal Grimm, the bartender. Grimm was known as a quiet, reserved man of unknown parts and antecedents, but in Channing that made no difference, so long as he behaved. Bill tilted his head and Grimm came over. He was sallow, large eyed and had a magnificent, fierce black mustache that curled up thickly at the ends. "What happened, Cal?"

"Can't rightly say, Sheriff. 'Been pretty busy. All I know is that this here feller had a few drinks then went over on his back. At first, I figured he'd passed out, then I seen all the blood. That's all I can tell you."

Bill Fay sent one of the younger cowboys for the coroner. He picked a man who looked as if he needed fresh air. Fay was disgusted, not only with himself, but with the two damned mysteries that had crept up on him in one day. Too, he felt a little resentment and dislike for the dead man in the *Red Lily*. Why in the name of good sense had he had to get killed in such a fashion, when he was just passing through Channing? Bill told Clem and Al to clean the place up. When the coroner came, he presented him with his new ward and left the saloon and went home. He was tired and irritated and went to bed with some choice, drawled, descriptive swear words on his lips.

2

IT WAS around two o'clock in the morning when Bill Fay clawed and climbed his way out of a deep, opaque slumber. He didn't want to wake up, but something was awakening him. He opened his eyes, allowed a few seconds for them to get into normal operation, then he looked up. His only deputy was standing over him, jostling his shoulder. The deputy did night duty while Bill had the daytime stint.

"Wake up, Bill, wake up." It sounded like a dirge and Bill sensed the urgency in the voice.

"All right Slim, all right. What in hell do you want me to do, jump up and dance?"

"Listen Bill, they's been another of them danged knifin's; this time it was Clem Porter."

Bill was wide awake now. "Oh no, Slim." The deputy nodded lugubriously and his walnut-handled Colt banged firmly against the bedpost.

"What happened?" Bill sensed the futility of his question as he asked it. It wasn't so much that he knew that Slim's cerebral capacity was limited to direct and savage gunplay, but it was also an inner conviction that whatever the scheme was, it wasn't time for him to come into the game with openers yet.

"Dun't know, Sheriff. Al found Clem on the floor of the *Lily* after closin' time, his throat—"

"Yeah, I know," Bill interrupted as he swung his legs over the bed, "slit from ear to ear."

Slim nodded with a trace of resentment in his eyes. The first time in three years as Fay's deputy he'd had something startling to tell his employer, and Bill stole his thunder. "Yeah, from ear to ear."

"D'you get the killer?"

"Naw; nobody seen it happen."

Bill dressed slowly. "All right Slim, you can get back to the office; I'll be along directly." Slim left and Fay turned the thing over in his mind as he scrubbed his teeth, shaved and washed. There was a reason behind all this; something that went deeper than appearances. At first, after the stranger had been knifed, he'd thought maybe it was just a case of an old grudge; but now, he knew that there was something big and sinister behind the killings. He wondered if there might be more slit throats in the offing. Well, he'd go out to the Lightning-seven and tell Alice, Bud Moon's wife, what little he could about her husband's death; then he'd come back to Channing and get to work on the slit throat business.

THE VILLAGE was as dark as a tomb when Bill walked through the cold pre-dawn morning to his office. The orange light of a lamp burned through the single barred window of his office and its shadows cast a weird, unpleasant reflection of iron bars on Hinkel's Emporium across the road. When Bill entered, the warmth from the woodstove struck him comfortably on the face. The smell of coffee permeated the office, and he inhaled deeply of its fragrance. Slim and Al Porter were sitting in silence and both looked up when he closed the door behind himself.

"Tell me all you can, Al." Fay's tone was gentle, but he dismissed the thought of condolences and got right to the point.

"There's nothin' I can tell you, Bill. I was makin' my last rounds to see that all the lamp wicks were out, an' checkin' the door and windows, when I seen somethin' on the floor in the moonlight. I lit a lamp an' went over to see what it was." He hastily swallowed some of the black, syrupy coffee in his cup.

Bill put the knife on the table before Alice...

"It was Clem. His throat was slit like the stranger's was; I reckon he'd been dead an hour or so then."

"What'd you do with him?"

"Coroner's got him."

Bill turned to Slim. "D'you see him?"

Slim blinked owlishly. "Who?"

Bill felt a surge of irritation. "Clem Porter."

"Yeah. He was the same as the other hombre."

Bill went over to the stove and poured himself a cup of black coffee. "You can go, Al."

The saloon-keeper stood up and his eyes were blazing. "Go, hell; I want action, Bill, an' I ain't goin' anywhere 'till I get it."

Bill knew how Al Porter felt, but he couldn't do anything about it. "I'll do everything I can, Al; you know that. But I've gotta figure this thing out first. I can't just go jumpin' around like a feather in a hot skillet." His tone was patient and gentle and Al Porter sagged a little at the shoulders.

"Yeah," he said slowly; "I'm sorry, Bill."

"Forget it, Al. As soon as I get any ideas, I'll come over."

Al Porter left and Bill turned to

Slim. "Sure hate to do it to you Slim, but I'm afraid you'll have to stay on duty here at the jail today. I gotta go out to the Lightnin'-seven an' tell Bud's wife that we found her husband." Slim nodded mechanically; he didn't mind, so long as something exciting was in the wind.

Bill was almost to the sprawling buildings of the Lightning-Seven before the first cold shafts of a pink dawn spread themselves into little banners of color on the horizon. It was cold, and Bill rode with his right hand under him on the saddle to keep it warm and his left hand holding the reins. He was pondering the killings, and Bud Moon's death, when he heard a slight noise.

Bill was hunched against the cold, and his tensed body was all that saved him; before he could turn his head, there was a sharp, searing pain in his upper arm. He sat up his horse, looked down and saw the handle of a small, pearl-handled knife sticking out of his leather and sheep pelt jacket. For just a fraction of a second Bill sat motionless, stunned; then he rammed his spurs into the startled roan gelding and the animal leaped ahead so quickly that Bill's neck snapped. The flat report of a small handgun floated up to him as he dashed through the tall grass, making a run for a clump of scrub oak five or six hundred feet away.

BILL WAS wide-awake now, and forgot the cold as he looped his reins around the saddle horn, took hold of the handle of the little knife with his left hand and pulled sharply. A red hot stab of pain flashed through him. He pocketed the knife, dismounted and removed his jacket and shirt, and wrapped the nasty, purplish gash with his clean bandana. Then he mounted again, turned the roan toward the chaparral thicket where he figured the assassin had been—or still was, he hoped. His normally placid, good-natured face was a mask of murderous anger as he rode, reins in the hand of his wounded arm, sixshooter in the other hand, into the brush. It was light now, and Bill knew he made an excellent target; but he was mad enough to ignore odds as he plunged into the brush.

Some sleepy birds winged heavily, drowsily away, making protesting noises in the thin, cold air and Bill left his snorting, nervous horse when the thorns on the brush made further passage on horseback impossible, and went afoot. He found no one, but he hadn't expected to. However, he did find bootmarks and, a little farther on, the clear imprints of a shod horse. He went over the ground like an Irish setter, probing, studying and grunting. The sun was peeking over the far off mountains when Bill alighted at the Lightning-seven home buildings. There was a harsh glint in his narrowed eyes, and his lips were compressed against his clenched teeth; little bunches of muscles swelled and throbbed along the angle of his jaw. Bill Fay was mad—as mad as he'd been in twenty years, and it showed.

A thin, stingy little streamer of greyish-white smoke arose from the kitchen chimney when Bill rapped on the door. While he waited for someone to appear, he looked out over the buildings. They were all neat, well-kept and trim. The corrals had no broken stringers or sagging gates, and the horses and cattle in the pastures nearest the house looked good. He mused to himself. Bud had been a wild, free, good-natured fellow. An ace-high stockman and a top-notch cowboy. He had been the type that would fix anything on a ranch he lived on, and keep it fixed.

The kitchen door opened and Bill doffed his Stetson. Bud's wife was handsome. Her figure was the perfection that is achieved only through rhythmic health and muscular coordination above the average. She wasn't tall, but every inch of her was in pro-

portion, from the petite richness of her cupid's bow mouth and hazel eyes with their long, upswept lashes, to the rounded arms, full breasts, down to the symmetrical swelling of her hips, and the muscular, beautiful legs that tapered to small feet. Bill Fay had seen her before, once or twice, but from a distance; now he stood stock still and looked with startled amazement at her. He felt the color come into his face as she smiled.

"Come in, Sheriff, I'm just making breakfast."

BILL WENT in and he remembered what he had come for. He made a wry face to himself as he tossed his hat on a chair. It was hard to think about telling her, but he decided he'd better do it now and get it over with. "Uh, Mrs. Moon, I've—"

"Why don't you call me Alice?"

Bill colored again; that made it harder. He doggedly went on. "Alice, I found Bud." If he'd expected a tearful scene, he didn't get it. She nodded.

"I know, Sheriff."

Bill grunted. "How'd you know?"

"A friend of mine in Channing came out here last night and told me all about it."

"That so?" He wanted the worst way to ask who the "friend" was, but knew he had no legitimate reason to ask. She put a thick crockery plate of pancakes on the table and poured his coffee.

"There's your breakfast, Sheriff." Bill sat down methodically and Alice Moon sat down to a cup of coffee across the table from him.

"What time did your friend leave, Alice?"

She raised her eyebrows, and little flecks of green showed in her eyes. When she didn't answer right away, Bill looked up at her, then dropped his eyes to his plate. "I'm not asking just to be curious. Some tame ape took a shot at me on the way up here this morning, an' threw a knife that got me in the right arm."

She was on her feet and her face was suddenly white and alarmed. Bill had tried for the third time to get a mouthful of pancake in his mouth. He put the fork down carefully, pushed the plate back in disgust and looked up at her. Her alarm wasn't inspired by any sudden worry of the attack on him as a person; Bill was sure of that.

"What's the matter?"

"Who did it?"

He shrugged, on the point of telling the truth, then a malicious little shaft of perversity darted through his mind and he smiled grimly. "Look." He tossed the ornate dagger on the breakfast table and it lay there, with dried blood around the hilt and handle, and she sank down into her chair with the look of a bird hypnotized by a snake. Bill crowded his opening. "I don't reckon he'll try it again."

Her hazel eyes were large in horror. "You killed him?"

Bill smiled blandly. "Let's eat, Alice; these things are plain everyday occurrences to me, an' right now I'm more hungry than remorseful."

She sat like a small statue and the rise and fall of her breasts showed the inner turmoil. She swung her gaze back to Bill Fay and there was a stark, naked plea in their depths. She was shaken to the soul and showed it. Bill felt elated. Something was begining to make him think he was in the game now, with openers but he knew that one slip would spoil everything. He decided on a long shot. "Why did he do it?"

Her guard was down, but not all the way yet. "Who?"

Bill eyed her shrewdly. His voice was soft and soothing. "That would-be bushwhacker?"

"Who was he?"

Bill shrugged and got up. He figured it was going to be an impasse, and his elation left him as he put his hat on the

back of his head. "You know who he was, Alice."

"Is he dead?" She was on her feet and close to him, the large eyes searching his and the generous, heavy lips parted over even, small teeth. Bill shrugged and jutted his chin toward the little knife on the table.

"There's his knife, Alice." He put a note of finality in his voice and she struck him on the chest. He'd seen the blow coming and caught her wrists and held her up close to him. Her breath was coming in ragged gusts. For a frantic second she struggled, then she relaxed and Bill released her. She went to a chair and sat down.

"He was my brother, Sheriff."

Bill nodded glibly, the sensation of elation returning. "I know, Alice, but why did he try to kill me?"

"He thought you were Al Porter; or maybe he knew you were the sheriff and were after him; or maybe he thought you were after me."

3

BILL had enough now to lock her up, anyway, so he decided to try a frontal approach. "Let's start at the beginning shall we?" She nodded dully. A pang of sympathy went through him; he poured her another cup of coffee and noticed how her small hands shook when she took it. "What's it all about, anyway?"

"Cal came to Channing a few months after I married Bud. We both knew our father had buried the loot from the holdups somewhere in Overland Pass. We were trying to find it, when Bud found out," her hands fluttered. "Cal swears he didn't kill Bud and I'm beginning to believe him; I think Clem did. Anyway, I made Bud promise to let us continue the search; then Bud disappeared and Cal came out here last night and told me you had found him." The hazel eyes lifted from the immaculate floor and went deep into the sheriff's steady gaze. Fay prompted her. "Is Cal Grimm, Porter's bartender, your brother?" She nodded. Something grisly floated across Bill's mind and he tabbed it for future reference. "How did Clem come into the picture?"

"You won't believe it, Sheriff, but Clem Porter was the partner of Black Anson in several stage robberies. He wasn't in the business, though, when Anson was captured."

Bill began to piece it all together. "Anson was your father, then?"

She nodded unconsciously. "Yes, he was my father and Cal Grimm, as you call him, was one of my brothers."

"You had more than one brother?"

"Yes. There was Elbert—Bert we call him. But I don't know whatever happened to him."

Bill had an inkling. "What did he look like?"

"'Tall, thin, with a long knife-scar on his cheek that he got in a brawl in Mexico. We never knew much about the fight because Bert was pretty disagreeable and kept to himself. He used to be a hireling gunman; I haven't seen him in six or eight years."

Bill nodded. He had seen her brother all right, and Cal Grimm seen him, too. In fact, Cal had been directly in front of her brother the last time he had a drink. Directly in front of him, across the bar. Bill shuddered inwardly and his flesh crawled as he pictured it. The last drink, the lightning like, murderous slash of the knife. He shook his head. His own brother, too; Lord, what a clan!

"Tell me something, Alice. Why so many knives? Why not guns?"

Her hazel eyes were distant. "I don't know, Sheriff, unless it's the Mexican blood. My mother was an Indian from Mexico. She taught us all how to take care of ourselves the way her people

did; my father didn't like it but she taught us, anyway."

Bill Fay drank his coffee and the silence in the warm kitchen was oppressive. There wasn't much more to discuss. Loose ends scattered all over the country from Channing and the *Red Lily* to Overland Pass where the stage wound its way over the Mogollons, but he could pick them up at his leisure. He drained his coffee cup and got up. Alice Moon was looking out the window and she looked even smaller than she was. He moved his shoulders in the jacket and tried to make it look like a plain case of duty.

"Come on, Alice; I'll saddle your horse for you." She got up and put on a heavy mackinaw without looking at him. He felt a little uneasy but, in spite of the warning in the back of his head, he didn't go over her for a gun.

THE RIDE back to Channing was uneventful and silent. Each was busy with their own thoughts. She couldn't be locked up in the old Mexican jail; there just weren't any accommodations there for women. Bill took her to Sara Runyon's house and explained to Sara and Ben that the county would pay them for guarding the prisoner. Sara was all for it, but Ben was reluctant and followed Bill out to his horse.

"Listen Bill, ain't they some other way you can work this case? Hang it all, it's askin' a lot of a man to have him turn his home into a jail, now, ain't it?"

Bill mounted and looked down on Ben. "If I could've thought of something else Ben, I wouldn't have brought her here; but damn it all, what else can I do?"

Runyon was silent and scowled into the distance. He tried awfully hard to think of some other way Alice Moon could be kept in custody, but he couldn't. Finally he shrugged reluctantly. "All right, Bill. But how long you reckon we'll have to keep her here?"

Bill shrugged. "Damned if I know Ben; but so far, I don't have the case wound up, an' there'll be no trial 'till I can finish it up an' prefer charges." Ben Runyon groaned loudly and shook his head as Bill Fay rode toward the livery barn across and down the street from his office. He left his horse in its usual stall and went to the office. Slim was sitting at his desk with a deep frown of concentration on his narrow forehead.

When the sheriff came in, he moved out of the chair. "Bill, they's somethin' damned funny goin' on aroun' here."

"That so? What's up, Slim?"

"Well, I went across the road to the *Lily* fer a beer an' Al Porter was madder'n a hornet an' doin' the bartendin' hisself. I ast him why an' he says Cal Grimm ain't around no more, that he took his bedroll, clothes an' all an' jest up an' disappeared." He shook his head. "An' Al's sure sore 'cause he don't want to have to wait bar today, what with his brother jus' barely dead an' all."

Bill waited for the drawling, wandering harangue to finish, then he smiled grimly. "Yeah; I'm not surprised Cal Grimm ain't around."

He told Slim what he'd stumbled into at the Lightning-seven, and the deputy's face sagged in incredulity. He pursed his lips and made a dry whistle. "I'll be damned. So all them knifin's an' Bud Moon's killin' was tied together. Lord, what a fine passel of kinsmen them folks are!"

Bill shrugged. "I've got to go to Overland Pass, Slim. I'll bet you a good horse Cal Grimm's up there huntin' his father's loot."

Slim kicked a chair back against the wall and hooked his spurred boot heels in the lower rung. "Ya goin' alone?"

Bill read the meaning behind Slim's question. He knew Slim was itching to get into the affair up to his armpits.

Bill sighed like a father does when his son wants to go on a particularly engrossing trip with him. "You want to ago along?"

Slim's chair came down off the wall with an emphatic thump. "Sure would admire to. 'Might be plenty fer two men, up there."

Bill nodded. "Let's lock up an' git goin'."

Slim locked the office, trudged beside Bill Fay to the livery barn where each man unslung the saddle boot with its carbine from his shoulder and buckled it under their rosaderos, mounted and rode out of town. Some liverybarn idlers watched them go with a buzz of speculative conversation and wide eyes. Sheriff Fay with a carbine in his saddleboot meant trouble; and when Slim went with him, armed for long-range shooting, too, there was double lethal grief ahead.

OVERLAND PASS was a winding, torturous road—just wide enough for one wagon, or stage, to crawl from the level country around Channing into the unsettled, wild country of the purple mountains. The road that wound like a struggling snake on over the Pass went on, across the foothills, down to San Gorgonio in the desert beyond, and lost itself in the hazy distance. It was an old, old road. Some said it was originally a Spanish military road made by enslaved Indians several hundred years before; but whatever its origin, it hadn't been improved since its founding, and looked more like a ragged ribbon of parallel scars cut into the thick adobe than a useable roadway.

Overland Pass itself was at timber line and there were little grassy, wind-swept meadows through the trees, where deer and bear and wolves cavorted under the eerie light of the moon. The old Pass was nothing more than a deep cut across the top of the grade and, since all stages crossing the hills at the Pass were by necessity forced to walk their teams, it had been—and still was—a favorite spot for highwaymen to stalk the loaded stages and rob them.

Overland Pass had a bloody, violent past, and Bill Fay thought of the old tales he had heard as a boy when he approached its summit. Too, since becoming a peace officer himself, he had upon several occasions, hunted down outlaws who had taken refuge in its primitive, wild area where tall old trees and little clearings had been backdrops to savage, bitter fights. Slim looked at the wild, desolate grandeur of the Pass and saw no beauty. To him there was trouble ahead, and possibly blood; but aside from that, he looked on Overland Pass as a handy spot for bushwhacking and nothing else.

"They's a lot of land up here, Bill. Jest how in hell're we gonna find Grimm?"

Bill had switched his thoughts and they were on Alice. Actually, so far as he knew, she had committed no crime. That she sought her father's buried loot was a legitimate affair. He yanked his thoughts back to the present situation when Slim spoke. Her hazel eyes were there, however, accusing him of riding for just one purpose: the capture and prosecution of her brother. That Cal was a killer, and one of the most bloody he had ever encountered, made no difference to those eyes. In fact, she didn't even know that he had killed her other brother—the one with the scar, who had apparently followed them both to Channing. Blood is thicker than water—or justice either, for that matter.

Bill shrugged and turned unhappy eyes to Slim. "Hell, I don't know; but I don't think we'll have any trouble." He pointed to an outcropping of rock that arose fifty feet higher than the surrounding country. "See that there ledge?"

Slim nodded. "Yeah, what about it?"

"Well, let's ride to the top of it an'

it'll give us a pretty good view of the country."

Slim nodded, smiling, and they rode through the trees and across the little meadows until they were on a faint deer trail that led upward, gradually, and ended on the eminence. Bill reined up and sat quietly looking at the awe inspiring scene. Normally he'd have enjoyed just sitting up there and drinking in the fabulousness of the endless, rolling terrain bathed in the clean sunlight; but now, he looked carefully, methodcally, for human sign. Slim swore and Bill turned quickly. The deputy was pointing. There was a sloping clearing, with a large old gnarled juniper tree in the center of it. A saddled bay horse stood, head down, drowsing, tied beneath it.

Bill nodded grimly. "Let's go. If that's not our man, no harm done." They rode slowly through the trees and brush until they were close to the clearing that held the tethered horse. As they approached, the animal caught their scent and raised its head.

"Tie up here, an' go the rest of the way afoot."

SLIM dismounted and tied his horse as did the sheriff. Slim, with the foresight of a man who could and would stumble over a pebble, yet in danger automatically observed every precaution, slid the thirty-thirty out of the saddle boot and cradled it in his arm. Bill was on the point of saying something, then clamped his jaws closed and stalked through the sunlight, his spurs making a tiny tinkling sound. They came up beside the horse, studied the spongy earth, made out the imprint of high heels and followed them.

To Slim, the stalking of a fugitive killer wasn't new. He was a little hunched, and his small eyes pierced the shadowy world beneath the trees like twin points of fire. There was no mercy in Slim and very little logic. It was a simple case of holler once. then shoot; no palaver, no questions, no quarter. Bill Fay, in the past, had occasionally rebuked Slim for his gunplay, but this time he felt no such qualms. Any man who could slit another's throat while looking him in the eye, and watch his own brother die in convulsions that drained him of his life's blood, and act as calm as Cal Grimm had done, was no one to waste mercy on.

The hazel eyes of Alice came to mind and he resolutely closed them out. This was no time for that. Grimm was as deadly as a rattlesnake. More deadly, in fact; the snake gave warning before he struck.

The heel prints were accompanied now and then by the sole print as well, but Bill wasn't tracking his man by anything as nebulous as the elusive sole prints. He was going strictly by the deep, obvious heel marks and even then he had difficulty finding them when they came to rocky or leafy ground. The trail led eastward, into the silent vastness ahead. It seemed to parallel the lay of the land at the top of the ridge, and Bill deduced, from the way the man was walking, that he knew where he was going. They had been on the trail for an hour or so when Slim laid a restraining hand on Bill's shoulder. The sheriff straightened up and looked around at his deputy.

Slim's eyes were squinted and his voice was little above a whisper. "Listen, Bill, up ahead."

The sheriff straightened into his normal stance and listened. At first he heard nothing; then, occasionally, he heard what sounded like a shovel striking rock. He nodded and pictured Cal Grimm, his fierce mustache bristling under the noon sun, sweating as he dug. The lawmen started forward again, this time stopping only when the sound of the shovel stopped, and resuming their careful stalking as soon as they were satisfied that the hunted man was back to work.

4

IN THE CLEAR air of timberline the sounds travel a long way; after what seemed to both men a reasonable distance had been covered, they still heard the sound of the shovel striking an occasional rock, but saw no sign of life. Grim now, and with thoughts of little beyond capturing or killing their prey, Fay and his deputy crept forward with their inner tension mounting as they went.

Coming to the fringe of wind twisted trees that marked the outer edge of a clearing, Bill saw him and froze. Slim looked beyond the sheriff. Grimm had his back to them and he was digging what appeared to be a trench. For a long moment the lawmen watched as he arduously dug into the soft, heavy loam; then Bill carefully unlimbered his .45, cocked it and held it in his hand pointing earthward. "Don't move a muscle, Grimm."

The sheriff had purposefully kept his voice low and even, enunciating each word clearly. He wanted the killer to know he didn't have a ghost of a chance. Grimm froze on his shovel handle. There was a brief moment when the cry of a distant bluejay came downwind to the men in the clearing very plainly. Bill motioned with his hand to Slim to keep an eye on the killer, holstered his gun and started forward. He figured it would be better to talk a little as he went; sort of prepare the man before him for what was to come.

"You played it pretty smart at that, Cal, but your biggest mistake was trying to bushwhack me this mornin'. Hell, until then I had no more idea what this was all about than the man in the moon." He was not more than ten feet from Grimm now and he leaned a little from the waist to take Grimm's sixgun from its smooth holster with the cutaway top.

At this minute Grimm, who hadn't been as complacent as he seemed, made a lightning-like lurch, and a shovelful of dirt struck Bill Fay in the chest and face. He closed his eyes against the gritty irritation and had the presence of mind to drop and roll forward, where he figured Grimm's trench would be. The hollow roar of a .30-.30 shattered the stillness and the thunderous roar of a .45 answered.

It took Bill Fay a full two minutes to get his eyes cleared of the dirt. He was swearing in a sing-song cadence of explosive profanity. Face streaked with salty tears and dirt, Fay arose, and for the second time in the short period of a few days, there was a raging tempest of murderous anger in his chest. He got methodically to his feet and looked around. There was no sign of Slim or of Grimm either.

Sheriff Fay began a systematic stalk after the imprints of the boot-heels again. He threw caution to the wind and went forward, hunched over, left hand hanging clawlike over his holstered sixgun, indomitable and stubbornly reckless. Suddenly a burst of gunfire up ahead made him straighten out of his crouch and dash through the trees.

SLIM HAD seen Grimm's action coming, but couldn't shoot because Bill was between them. As soon as Fay hit the ground, Slim fired one frantic shot at the running, dodging figure of the killer. Grimm swerved, hesitated and tossed a random shot at Slim with no hope of a hit—but with good reason to believe the deputy would flinch if not dodge, and thus ruin his aim and chances for a second shot.

When Grimm disappeared in the shadowy vastness of the scattered trees Slim was behind him, cautiously loping along, carbine at the ready, trying to

keep his man in sight and awaiting an opportunity for a second shot.

Grimm suddenly crossed the narrow end of a clearing and Slim fired. The fugitive stumbled, recovered and went on, but suddenly a roaring .45 on Slim's left, coming from the direction of their hidden horses, shattered a flat rock in front of him. Slim flopped behind a juniper stump and looked around. He couldn't see a thing, but he knew there was another gunman in the brush and shadows off to his left.

Slim saw Bill Fay before the sheriff came into range of the second gunman. He raised his head to shout when the hidden sixshooter bucked and roared again and Bill Fay went down in a heap. Slim's anger made him slit-eyed. He wasn't sure whether the sheriff had hit the dirt or had been wounded. He pushed his sixgun around the stump and fired three times in rapid succession into the bushes where he figured the hidden gunman was hiding. Immediately a .45 spat its lethal venom at him and he flinched involuntarily as the leaden slug smacked into the stump he was behind.

Bill Fay moved very cautiously. He remembered that his legs had folded under him when the gun went off. He felt no pain, but he was almost certain that he was wounded. Only a little dull throbbing went through him when he went down and that was from the knife-slash in his right upper arm. He figured Slim had Cal Grimm cornered, and opened his eyes a crack and stole a quick appraising look around. He was on the edge of the clearing and there was a ragged old lightning-struck fir tree—or what was left of it, a few feet to his left. He bunched his muscles, still felt no pain, and half rolling, half running, got to the tree just as two guns went off.

BILL WAS safe behind the tree, but his surprise was complete. Both of the gunshots had come from the trees and brush in front of him while Slim was behind and a little to the right of him. He shook his head. Cal Grimm had an accomplice and he wondered who in the devil it could be. Possibly Al Porter, although Alice had said very plainly—when he visited her at Runyon's—that Al Porter knew his brother was up to something, but didn't know what it was all about.

Slim's handgun went back into its holster and the glittering barrel of the .30-.30 crept around the stump. Bill watched it in fascination, turned back and probed the chapparall bushes for the target, and saw it.

A man's sweaty checkered shirt was barely visible among the thick brush. Bill estimated the man's position and figured it was his left side that was in sight. The echoing crash of Slim's rifle rattled across the still hills and over the peaks with a deafening roar. The plaid shirt seemed to come up off the ground and float violently backwards. A loud, shrill scream split the air and a fusilade of .45 fire roared and thundered, cutting twigs, ricochetting off rocks and crashing into tree trunks. Slim had dropped his rifle and was hugging the earth behind his old stump with his face down while Bill Fay knelt closer to his fir tree and counted the shots.

Suddenly there was silence, and Bill knew the remaining outlaw was holding an empty gun. He risked a peek and drew no fire. "Come on out, hombre, an' keep your hands high."

There was no answer and Bill smiled grimly to himself. "If you don't come out, I'm comin' in after ya. Ya got ten seconds to make up yore mind."

Still no answer and Bill counted to himself until he reached ten, arose despite the hoarse pleadings of Slim, who was partially exposed from behind his stump, and stepped into plain sight. Instantly, there was a single shot and Bill felt the breath of death as it rushed past his head. He thumbed his gun to fire and Slim's thirty-thirty roared behind and off to one side of him.

When Slim fired, Bill was still crouched, legs apart, thumb resting on the smooth hammer of his single action .45. There was a loud, racking gasp from the bushes in front of him and he saw them churn wildly for a frantic second. Bill knew Slim's shot had hit home and he spoke out of the side of his mouth. "No more, Slim; that one did it."

Thumb still holding lightly to the hammer of his gun, Bill Fay went slowly forward. No movement came from the brush, and he knew if the fighter in there wasn't dead or wounded so badly that he couldn't pull a trigger and sight a gun, there might be two dead ones to go back to Channing. Still, he was pretty certain that he'd counted the shots right.

Bill used his right arm to push the brush aside. He couldn't see anything, so he stepped into the thicket and began to muscle his way through the tangled, thorny growth, gun ready and eyes probing intently for sign of the gunman.

Having forced his way into the middle of the thicket and not found any trace of his quarry, Bill holstered his gun and began a swift, noisy ascent until he came to a hollowed out little clearing near the back of the dense growth. Automatically, his eyes swept the area ahead and took in the two sprawled figures at once. One he recognized as Cal Grimm, or whatever his real name was. Cal's shirt front was a shambles of torn flesh and warm blood. Bill thought it resembled his brother's shirt after Cal had slashed his throat. His eyes swung mechanically to the other figure and he froze for just a second before he ripped his way insanely through the remaining brush and knelt beside it.

"Alice."

HER EYES were closed but Bill could see the faint flutter of a pulse in her throat. He looked down and saw where the .30-.30 slug had entered her body. There was only a tiny hole inside the torn shirt where the rich, creamy flesh showed through. The little hole was purple and slightly swollen around its jagged edges and a thin stream of blood had run out of it, but Bill knew better than to turn her over. It wouldn't be a pretty sight. Where a thirty-thirty comes out, sometimes there's a hole the size of a pony shoe and the raw, quivering flesh seems to want to crawl into its own bloody nakedness.

Bill's face was deathly white when she opened her eyes. The hazel eyes looked out at him from under the long, upswept lashes and he knew she recognized him. "Alice; how did you do it?" The lips, so full and sensitive tried awfully hard to look carefree but the effort wasn't any good. The voice matched the eyes, it was soft, sorry and friendly.

"It wasn't hard, Sheriff—er, Bill. I kept a derringer when you took me in. I planned to use it on you but I lost my nerve; I used it on Ben Runyon when Sara was at the store. It was easy, Sheriff Bill Fay."

His throat was tight and his eyes burned behind the lids. "Alice, why? He wasn't worth it."

She nodded ever so slightly. "No, I know it now, Bill, but I didn't know it until you shot me." There was a pause. "Any hope for me, Bill?"

Her voice was feebly bantering but Bill caught the undercurrent of fear too. He shook his head. "Alice, I want to tell you something."

Her eyes closed and a tiny, soft smile crossed her face. "Never mind, Bill, I know; y'see, I knew it the morning you came up for, uh, breakfast." She winked and there was a tiny tear in the corner of her eye. "Me too, Bill."

She didn't speak any more. A frown settled between her proud, arched eyebrows and the obsidian blackness of her hair glinted dully where it fell across his sleeve.

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RAILROAD BUILDER

The Story of General Dodge

by JAMES HINES

A GENERATION ago, a new system of transportation was being born; the Iron Horse was galloping across the western plains.

There are certain names linked with the railroad—men like Ames, Joy, Harriman, and Vanderbilt. There are others, less well-known and perhaps forgotten, who built the iron trails across the plains and throughout the mountains with no less genius than those who promoted, financed, and consolidated them. Among these engineers and builders, at the top, stands Grenville M. Dodge, whose railroad pathfinding and construction achievements are basic to the transportation system of North America.

The whole career of Major-General Dodge is with railway expeditions, west of the Missouri River. Beginning his first survey in 1853, for the Mississippi & Missouri River Railroad, he wound up thirty-three years later in his final survey for the Mexican & Southern, of which General U. S. Grant was president.

General Dodge's services were basic in railroad pathfinding and building throughout the West. His surveys alone gave him a foremost field in engineering; also he built about sixty thousand miles of track.

His chief survey was for the Union Pacific Railroad, although he made one for the Texas & Pacific, along the thirty-second parallel, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War. (It has been said that Jefferson Davis was the first man to see the possibilities of a great transcontinental line.) General Dodge's third survey was made for the Union Pacific from Salt Lake to Puget Sound, a survey, which became in later years basic in building the Oregon Short Line, giving the road its first tidewater outlet.

General Dodge's services to railroads west of the Mississippi River are so great that he stands unequalled among his fellow railroad men. He was

active for sixty years in all fields of railroad building; so when we consider his influence in railroad legislature, combined with his work as a projector, financier, and director, he occupies a great place in the history of the western railroads, more than any other man. His legislative influence was greater than that of any other person in the long period extending from 1860 to 1912, when he retired.

His whole life is so bound up with railway history that when the history of the settlement and development of the West is told, his name should not be left out.

He had dealings with Lincoln in Pacific railroad legislation; his relation with Grant was in completing the Union Pacific. He had contracts with McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft in railway adjustments that took place between the years 1898 and 1912.

IT WAS NEW country where the railroads were being built, in a period when building was overshadowed like everything else by the means of both the promotion and the building. General Dodge could not be subdued, and believed in putting a railroad through once it was started.

After the completion of the Union Pacific in 1869, Dodge began with Colonel Thomas Smith of Pennsylvania in building the Texas & Pacific and surveyed it from Shreveport to San Diego. He also became associated with Jay Gould, the famous railroad man. Gould took a great interest in Dodge and depended upon him. Dodge formulated many of the capitalists' plans for consolidation and extension of railroads.

During the 'seventies and 'eighties, Dodge organized various construction camps, and upon his locations financiers depended in the actual building of the road.

General Dodge organized the American Railway & Improvement Company and built the New Orleans and the Pacific and the International Railway & Improvement Company. He constructed the M. K. & I. from Fort Worth to Taylor, and the International Railroads of Texas from San Antonio to Laredo. He organized the Colorado Construction Company and built the Fort Worth & Denver; organized the Oriental Construction Company and built a line from Laredo, Texas, to Mexico City; established the Panhandle Construction Company and extended the Fort Worth & Denver to Trinidad. He organized the Pacific Railroad Improvement Company and built the Texas & Pacific from Fort Worth to El Paso. The California & Texas Construction Company was formed even earlier by Dodge.

He served as president for the Missouri, Kansas & Texas, of the Fort Worth & Denver; of the St. Louis, Des Moines & Northern; of the Denver, Fort Worth & Texas; of the Abilene & Southern, and of the Union Pacific, Denver & Gulf. He succeeded General Grant as president of the Mexican & Southern, lifting a great load off his old commander's shoulders at a very critical time.

Dodge's career in the Civil War was that of a railroad engineer; he made an excellent soldier under Grant, Sherman, and Halleck, in the armies of the West. There were few persons who could, from the debris that the Confederate troops had left, construct roads and straighten out a track over which trains could run.

"Dodge," said an Army general, "had a knack of straightening out a rail that the Confederate soldiers had made to resemble a snake." General Howard once said: "No one could build a railroad like General Dodge."

Years after the Civil War, General Sherman would loaf in General Dodge's office in New York City and tell anyone who would listen how General Dodge repaired the railroads and

built bridges as fast as the Union troops could march.

General Howard said: "Dodge was Sherman's favorite on account of his work in bridgemaking and railway construction on the march of battle."

IN THE SPRING of 1862, Dodge was transferred to Mississippi. In a year, General Sherman considered him to be the best in exacting railroad building for the military service in the West. Although he did not possess Grant's military genius, nor Sherman's genius in handling troops, everybody turned to him to solve railroad problems.

In 1865, General Grant sent Dodge to conduct a campaign against the Indians. He did not send him because he was a close friend, but because the commander-in-chief believed him to be the best qualified to lead troops whose enthusiasm for service was on the wane, and to meet the Indians in their practical kind of warfare. Nothing could have been more timely in the scheme of building the Union Pacific Railroad, for all had come to the plains at an hour when everything was at a standstill.

Dodge was a man of military education and experience, and his genius for building railroads was remarkably balanced.

After the Civil War, Grant and other officers wrote their memoirs, and insisted that Dodge do the same. At first he would not hear of it, but finally they succeeded in getting him started. He found out that it was a much harder job than he had expected. He wrote his life story down to 1870; when at the most interesting part, he quit. Had it not been for his wide correspondence with other high railroad officials, much of the valuable railroad history would have been lost.

GRENVILLE MELLEN DODGE was born April 12, 1831, at Danvers, Massachusetts. Though of excellent stock, his parents were not too stable, financially; but they did manage to send young Dodge to Norwich University, where he became a cadet and a student of engineering.

His father was eminent in neither politics, finance, nor education, but the family owned and operated some of the largest sawmills in New England. One of these was run by General Dodge's grandfather.

Most of the Dodges were millwrights, farmers, canners, weavers, small merchants and town officeholders. Now and then you would find one of them a schoolteacher or a soldier. A few were surveyors who laid out small country roads. There was nothing in his family that foretold his career.

In addition to running a sawmill, the Dodges slaughtered cattle and hogs and cut marsh hay. They peddled the meat out over the town. Young Dodge drove the first four-wheeled market wagon ever seen on the streets of Salem, Massachusetts.

When Dodge was born, his parents were then living at Danvers, in a house with another family. His father was a man of more than ordinary ability and he dabbled in politics. His mother was a very intelligent woman.

His father, Syvanus Dodge, did not prosper in Danvers, and the family began a series of moves which made them only poorer and poorer. The family moved to Lynn where they led a poor and unhappy life, for typhoid fever nearly killed young Dodge's father. They moved to Salem where they knew Hawthorne, the writer; and finally after so many changes, moved back to Danvers.

Of their return to Danvers, Dodge's brother, Nathan P. Dodge, said, "We had neither rugs nor carpets."

Syvanus Dodge knew how to butcher cattle and hogs, so he fell back on his father's profession, in order to keep the wolf from his family's door.

Syvanus Dodge helped vote James K. Polk into office as President of the United States, and for his reward, Polk had him appointed postmaster of South Danvers in 1846. He also opened a bookstore in one end of the post office.

There was a little schoolhouse on Main Street leading to Salem, and here General Dodge began his first schooling. At thirteen, he went to work on a large farm outside of Danvers, which was ran by Mrs. Landers, a high and mighty woman in that section. She had two sons, Charles and Frederick. Frederick had returned from Norwich University and was about to start upon a career as a civil engineer. Charles was in the ice business. Frederick surveyed and constructed a siding from the Eastern Railroad to his brother's ice house, and young Dodge assisted the engineer. That was his first survey.

Frederick Landers later became one of the ablest government surveyors in the exploration of the West. He was greatly impressed with young Dodge, and told the boy that he should go to Norwich University and study to be a civil engineer. This fired young Dodge's ambitions, and he vowed that he would go to college. At fifteen, he entered the Durham Academy in New Hampshire, took a year's preparatory course, and then entered Norwich in the autumn of 1848. Norwich University was located at Norwich, Vermont.

DODGE WAS there about three months when the class was suspended for attending a dance in town. The class was then sent to a Methodist school, Thetford College at Newbury, and compelled to finish the year there. The military class rebelled under the strict church rules and their religious methods. But Dodge liked it there, in spite of the times he almost got expelled. He wrote in his diary: "The good old times at Thetford will never be forgotten. We gummed the professors, cheated the steward, and sneaked out with the girls."

His class was allowed to return to Norwich again in the autumn of 1849.

In those days Norwich was one of the greatest schools in the country. The students studied steam transportation and the expansion of railroads from the Atlantic to the Pacific, as the students of today study television, radar, and radio. There were no railroads west of Chicago, although there were dreams and dreamers, explorers and pioneers. Dodge was interested in railroad building and the excitement stirred him to the depths of his being.

He went home for his Christmas vacation but returned to Norwich in 1850. Slavery was being discussed heatedly in school, as there were several students from southern homes.

Dodge's final months at Norwich were filled with difficulties. Money from home was scarce, and he performed all sorts of menial jobs to keep himself in school. He hoed potatoes, oiled harness, cut timber, was assistant janitor, drove wagons, milked cows and cut hay. The last days in college found him rebellious to discipline, hot-tempered, and with a raw craving for life.

His diary records: "Feb. 14th. Went to a dance in town last week; a waitress spilled a bowl of soup on my best coat and pants, and had not the politeness to apologize, so I refused to pay the bill, raised hell and came home."

Dodge graduated from Norwich University in the midwinter class from January to June 1851, ranking high. He supplemented his university training by taking a special course in a private school, conducted by the founder of Norwich University, Captain Alden Partridge, who ranked among the foremost military and engineering instructors of that time. He said in later life that it was this course in Partridge's school that gave him confidence

to perform the actual duties of his profession as a civil engineer.

After graduating he went west to Chicago to seek his fortune in the railroad business. That was as far west as the railroads had been built at that time. He soon became affiliated with the Rock Island Railroad. Though very young, he soon made a name for himself and came under the personal attention and guidance of the railroad's chief engineer. He became a recognized authority on railroad construction. At that time various railroad companies were competing with their eyes fixed on building a railroad as far west as the Pacific.

Abraham Lincoln visited Dodge when he lived at Council Bluffs, Iowa. They talked only about sixty minutes but it is said that from Dodge, Lincoln got his idea for the route of the Union Pacific.

On the morning of August 13, 1859, Lincoln stood on the high bluffs overlooking Council Bluffs. It was evident that he was thinking of railroad building as well as slavery, in 1859. He told his companions that morning, while overlooking the distant flood-plain of the Missouri River, that this was the logical place for the terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad, and that he would designate it.

Before Lincoln was inaugurated as President, a little group of railroad promoters were in Washington. They were Dodge, Blairman, Farman, and Durant. They were for the single route of the proposed Pacific Railroad —the route of the Platte River Valley with the eastern terminus at Council Bluffs, Iowa.

THE CIVIL WAR broke out as Confederate guns were heard at Fort Sumter, and all of General Dodge's dreams and plans crashed. He believed that the sooner the slaves were freed from doing the work of the South, the sooner the conflict would be over.

Sometime after the War broke out, Dodge was commissioned as colonel of an Iowa regiment at home. He was one of the best-trained military men in Iowa at that time. He served first in Missouri, taking part in the battle of Pea Ridge that broke the power of the Confederacy west of the Mississippi. He was transferred to Tennessee, and made his mark by quick construction of railroad lines to be used by the Union Armies. Both Grant and Sherman said that he could repair rails as fast as the Confederacy could tear them up. Under General Grant, he organized an excellent spy system that collected information of inestimable value in planning Grant's campaigns.

Dodge received his commission as major-general a short time before he was wounded at Atlanta. General Grant pressed the matter to have Dodge made a major-general three weeks after the fall of Vicksburg; he had taken the matter up personally with Lincoln after the battle of the Wilderness. By this time, Dodge was on his way with Sherman toward Atlanta, commanding the Sixteenth Corps, and the situation was rather puzzling, for he was but a brigadier-general.

During the siege at Atlanta, Dodge was wounded in the head. Although he lived, that wound ruined his services with the Union forces. He returned home to Council Bluffs, Iowa.

He had been home only two weeks when he received a telegram from Thomas C. Durant, vice-president of the Union Pacific, urging him to come to New York to discuss business matters with the Union Pacific officials, as the affairs of the Union Pacific were at a standstill.

General Grant sent for Dodge to command the Department of Missouri. He accepted this position and after being in command two months, his repressive measures were so severe that he quieted the state more than any

other person since the opening of the Civil War. This was saying a great deal, as Missouri's population was for both the North and the South.

NO SINGLE person was more vital in the construction of the Union Pacific than General Dodge in the campaigns which he made against the Indians in 1865-66. In 1865, the headquarters of the Department of Missouri was transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Dodge was placed in command there.

All Indians north of the Arkansas River had united and declared war. When Dodge took up his position of guarding the Overland mail from Indian hostilities in February, 1865, the situation seemed hopeless. It was a bad winter, with snow three feet deep, and the thermometer registering thirty below. In Colorado the people were depressed and in a panic; there were not enough soldiers to protect the settlers from the Indians, who were a deadly menace.

Dodge with B. M. Hughes, agent of the Overland stages, and Edward Creighton, general manager of the Overland telegraph, got together and outlined their plans to repair all telegraph lines that the Indians had cut and to attack all bands of hostile Indians, no matter how small, north of the Platte River and south of the Arkansas. General Dodge took two big troops of cavalry to protect them. He had things quieted down by April, 1865.

After Lincoln was assassinated, Dodge was assigned to command all U. S. forces in Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah. The Union Pacific Railroad Company reminded him that he had promised to become their chief engineer of railroads when the war ended. They offered him a salary of $10,000 a year and stock in the Credit Mobolier Construction Company. They wanted him to resign from the army and begin work at once. Dodge pointed out to them that the railroads could not be built until the Indians were subdued.

Grant urged Dodge to stay in the army with his rank of major-general. Sherman viewed the angle differently from either Grant or the Union Pacific; he thought Dodge could combine the work of chief engineer of the railroad with his military operations on the plains.

In April, 1866, Dodge met Durant in St. Joseph, Missouri, in the final conference on the subject of becoming chief engineer for the Union Pacific. Durant believed that Dodge was the only engineer who could go to the plains and reorganize the construction crews, fight the Indians, and at the same time build a railroad.

Three months after General Dodge accepted the position of chief engineer, Jack Casement—a man whose track laying was known throughout the world—assembled a thousand men, and one hundred teams, on the prairies forty miles from Omaha, Nebraska. The men were a mixed crowd of both Union and Confederate ex-soldiers, ex-convicts from old prisons in the East, mule-skinners, bushwhackers, and New York Irish. Somewhere in California, another group was pushing the Central Pacific eastward. General Dodge had agreed to build the Union Pacific from the Missouri River to Promontory Point, Utah.

Dodge spoke to the crowd of railroad workers: "Boys, I want you to do what Jack Casement tells you to do. We've got to beat that Central Pacific crowd."

WITH LOUD yells the men swung into action. The track laying of the Union Pacific increased to three miles a day within the first month. The workers lay four rails to the minute, and like a great brown worm the rails slowly crept across the plains. At each base, a wild boom town would spring up. There would be gamblers, loose

women, and all their devices to lure the railroader's money away from him.

In August, 1866, the first Indians attacked. Dodge was ten miles west of the lines when he heard of the trouble. Immediately he ordered his private car—an arsenal on wheels—hooked on the handiest engine and with twenty men raced to defend their brother railroad workers. The Indians fled under their fire, and there wasn't much to the battle. But this was the beginning of twenty months of continuous warfare against the Indians in the building of the first transcontinental railroad.

Through Colorado they pushed the railroad, on up into Wyoming, where the Cheyenne Indians made war on them. They stood at the gateway of the mountain fastness, and they had no intention of letting a railroad run through their lands.

Government commissioners talked with members of the engineering party who wanted to suspend operations for six months, until the government could send out more soldiers to protect the railroad builders. Dodge wrote Oliver Ames, "If we stop now, we'll never get the road started again. I'll wager that in another year we'll have the road built to Salt Lake." Dodge wanted to put the road through, and that is what he did.

They crossed the North Platte. To the south was the Medicine Bow Range, home of the Sioux, the Cheyennes, and the Crow Indian Tribes. They reached Fort Bridger and from there pushed into Mormon country.

Some of the railroaders wanted to know how the Mormons lived, and visited a Mormon household. They found the woman friendly. Presently a small boy entered, and said, "I came over for Pa's slippers. 'He's goin' to stay with us a week,' Mom says."

The Central Pacific was pushing eastward, while the Union Pacific was pushing westward. The Union Pacific and the Central Pacific paid little attention to each other until they were less than one hundred miles away. Advance surveying parties began to cross and recross each other's path. This caused trouble.

The Union Pacific and the Central Pacific joined tracks on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Point, Utah. They had a big ceremony. Jack Casement called the assembly to order. The Reverend Todd offered prayer. Dr. Harkness of Sacramento, said, "Gentlemen of the Pacific railroad, the last rail needed to complete the greatest railroad enterprise in the world is about to be laid; the last spike needed to unite the Atlantic with the Pacific is about to be driven."

He turned and handed the golden spike to President Stanford of the Central Pacific while Governor Trittle of Nevada turned and held out the golden spike to Thomas Durant. Governor Trittle spoke, "To the iron of the East and the gold of the West, Nevada adds her link of silver to span the continent."

President Stanford spoke for a few minutes, "And now, Gentlemen, we will lay the last tie and drive the last spike."

They lay the last tie in position, one of California laurel, finely polished and bearing a silver plate with the inscription: *The last tie laid in the completion of the Pacific Railroad, May 10, 1869.*

A wire was attached to the golden spike and when Stanford struck it, an electric spark signaled the nation that the first transcontinental railroad had been completed. The crowds cheered; everybody was happy. A telegraph operator squatted along the tracks. His instrument clicked: "General U. S. Grant, President of the United States, Washington, D. C. Sir: It gives me great pleasure to have the honor to report the last rail has been laid and the last spike has been driven in the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad."

IN 1870, EIGHT months after the Union Pacific was completed, General Dodge resigned his position as chief engineer. He was chosen to be the chief engineer of a proposed route through the South and to build the Texas & Pacific. It lacked only a few miles of being as long as the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific combined.

All through his life General Dodge was with one railroad after the other. By 1865, he had attained a position of eminence and authority at home and abroad. During the Spanish-American War he was a Major-General of Volunteer Corps. However, he was never commissioned, holding the appointment by the President of the United States.

Dodge and Van House built a railroad across Cuba. In 1903, they organized the Cuban Railroad Company. In 1905, Dodge planned to construct an additional five hundred miles, but the Cuban insurrection forced him to change his plans. This was the end of his active railroad building, rounding out more than half a century of railroad building.

In 1905, Dodge was interested in the possibilities of railroad building in South America or should we say the Pan American Railroad. But his dreams came to the end when his physician told him that he would have to retire on account of his health.

In three months he had resigned from the board of directors of four different railroads and returned to his old home at Council Bluffs. He surrendered his business duties, but never lost interest in world affairs. He kept a tremendous correspondence with both high government and railroad officials.

He died January 3, 1916. His body was placed in a stone mausoleum on a high hill in a cemetery at Council Bluffs, Iowa. His tomb overlooks the great flood-plain of the broad Missouri, where Lincoln and he stood and dreamed great dreams about the railroad world.

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Overland Pass

(*continued from page 20*)

Bill didn't know how long he sat there before Slim came up. It must have been quite awhile because Slim had gone after all the horses and brought them up. Slim had an inherent tact Bill had never suspected. "Let's go Sheriff; it's gittin' into late aft'noon."

THE RIDE back to Channing was dolorous. Slim tried hard but finally he quit trying.

"Say Bill, when you went down, what happened, anyway?" Bill pulled his boot out of the stirrup and held his leg out. The heel was shot off his boot. Slim shook his head and forced a grin. The sheriff's face was set on the distant hills where the sun, a bloody orb in the azure sky, was casting soft, graceful shadows against the harshness of nature's work shop, and the whole world and all that was in it ignored the two sodden lumps of clay that bumped along on the two horses being led down the Overland Pass road toward Channing.

★

Bill Jones was a game-warden in Arizona; Matt Smith was a game-warden in Alaska. And when Bill went north to look up his older friend, he found that there wasn't much difference in their jobs, and in the tights they got into, outside of temperature!

COWBOY IN THE ARCTIC

An Off-Trail Story

by LEE FLOREN

ALTHOUGH it was July, the Arctic wind was cold, cutting through Game Warden Bill Jones' heavy woolen pants and mackinaw. Ahead was the dark bulk of one of the Pribilof Islands, and there was a wry smile on Jones' wide lips. The thought came that he was a cowpuncher in a motorboat, and he was cold and tired of the North, even though he had not been many days in this area.

But he had to either find Matt Smith...or Smith's body.

Motor dead on the small gasoline launch, Bill Jones paddled into a dark little bay where coarse sand came down to meet the lapping water. *Eyes might be watching me,* he thought, *and this night is not dark enough to hide me.* Accordingly he kept close to the thick wild rosebushes and buckbrush that lined the bank on the west, his paddle soundlessly dipping the Arctic Ocean.

Now that the motor was silent Bill could hear the loud boom of the bull seals on the rocky beach. Their endless roaring sounded like thundering surf. He could see them on the sand; they were dark, large and heavy spots under the moon. Surrounding them were smaller spots. These were the *matkas*—the seal cows.

Sure a lot of them, Bill thought. *From what I've been told, by this time of the month all the seals should have landed here on the breeding grounds.*

Then he grinned. He knew a lot about *beef* cows but darned little, if anything, about *seal* cows, except that

their fur was in high demand, and worth hundreds of dollars.

Damn old Matt Smith for getting lost in this godforsaken strip of island where a man got cold even in July!

But it didn't seem logical that the game-warden should be lost, for Matt had patrolled this section of the Pribilofs for about six years, and Bill Jones figured his old friend knew every cove and rock along the shoreline.

Matt might be dead...murdered. Bill Jones did not like that thought. He remembered his talk with the Captain a few days back.

"Jones is my name, Captain. Bill Jones. I'm a game warden, too; but my territory is northern Arizona, and instead of protecting seals I protect cattle and small game. I trap coyotes, wolves, cougars and bobcats. I'm on my vacation and my old pal Matt Smith is stationed up here, so thought I'd come up and visit him—been about eight years since I last saw him."

"You have known Matt for some time, then?"

"Almost thirty years. Matt was at our house the day I was born. He and my dad were cowhands together, and Matt got me interested in game-wardenin'. But he had itchy feet, so up to Alaska he goes."

The captain had walked to the wall map. He had shown Bill Jones where the Pribilof camp of Matt Smith was located. "He has a camp tender. Matt has been out for two months, for seal are running. Last word we had from him was three weeks ago. The fishing boat *Saskatoon* brought in word they had talked to him."

Bill Jones had listened.

"You'll find Matt at this point, Mr. Jones." The Captain's forefinger had stopped on a small island.

"Lots of water between here and there."

"Matt has his boat here. He left it here to get some motor repairs done to it. I have been wondering why he hasn't come in to get it. You can pilot it out to his camp."

"Lots of difference between neck-reinin' a horse and steerin' a motor launch."

"They have one thing in common," the captain had said; "they both get balky. Good luck, sir."

"And good luck to you, Captain."

So Bill had swung the launch through blue cold waters, and he had found the camp of Matt Smith; but the old game warden was not in camp. And the wide face of the Eskimo camp-tender was worried. "He leave in canoe. No come back."

"How long ago?"

The old man had counted on gnarled, knuckle-big fingers. "Eleven big days. Me, I worried."

By careful questioning, Bill Jones got the story. And interwoven into the stumbling words was a great fear. Poachers were busy this time of the year. Seal furs were worth much money. Had Matt fought it out with poachers—and had they killed him?

"You find Matt, mister?"

"I'll do my damnedest, camp tender."

So now, under a silvery moon, water chopped by cold wind, Game Warden Bill Jones pushed the launch in close to shore, the thick brush screening his advance. And his heart was cold, and not from the wind. For six days he had patrolled these dark-brushed, fog-bound shores. And what he had found had made him fear for the life of his old friend, Matt Smith.

For he had found many carcasses of skinned seals. Blue foxes had gnawed on the fatty carcasses, and some had been a month or so old.

And he had found no trace of Smith. He had, in fact, seen not a living human since leaving the old Eskimo camp tender. He had a few more beaches to look over, and then, if he found nothing, he was going to return to the camp, for Matt Smith might

have come in while he, Bill Jones, was gone.

But he knew this was not true.

Had Matt come into camp, the tender would have given him the letter Bill had left there, and Matt would have looked him up by now.

Bill remembered the stinking carcasses. Poachers were at work here—and they had already stolen many valuable pelts. They had walked out into the seals with their clubs working and then their sharp knives had loosened the hides—the precious furs.

And maybe a sharp knife had cut Matt Smith's throat?

BILL JONES rammed the launch's nose into the sand and leaped out, pulling in the boat and tying it to a thick short tree. Then he broke off brush and laid this across the small launch to camouflage it. For if there were poachers here—and they saw the launch and stole it—

Well, when a horse bucked a man off, he could walk into camp; but when you lost your boat here, a man couldn't swim into camp. Too far and the water was ice cold.

Bill squatted in the brush, sixshooter heavy on his right hip, and looked at the clearing. The din from the seals was a stifling roar. The seals were growling and snarling. But the big bulls were tiring—they had fought and bred for a month or so, and weariness and age were overhauling them. The young bachelor seals were the gay young blades now with the cows. The old bulls, hacked and scarred, were jealous, but they were on the sidelines, now.

Behind the beach were barren hills. Moonlight showed wisps of fog stretched along their tops. The poachers would have a camp back in those hills, he figured; that is, if the poachers were still here. He knew they had been active recently in this area for he had seen fresh carcasses floating along the shoreline. He knew one thing, for sure: he had to be careful.

Squatting there, he built his plan—he would move along the coast to his right, then go into the hills through the coulee that came in there to the edge of the water. Thus he would be under cover all the time.

Winchester .30-30 in hand, he went along the coast, the roar of the seals in his ears, their sultry smell in his nostrils. He reached the point where the coulee came down out of the hills, and he left the brush there. He had a small beach, about a hundred feet wide, to cover. He was moving across this strip of rock and sand when the voice came in from behind him.

"You are our prisoner, game warden!"

BILL JONES froze in his tracks. The sound of the voice, after not hearing a human voice for days, startled him as much as did the menacing words.

"You drop the rifle!"

Bill let his Winchester fall to the ground. The voice was guttural and contained a northern European accent. Thick, ugly, mean.

"You get his pistol, Olaf."

"Yah."

Bill thought, *At least two of them,* and he realized he had walked into a trap. The thought came that he must have blundered past them as they lay hidden in the brush.

"Up with your hands, man!"

Bill had no other choice than to raise his hands. He heard a boot scrape rock behind him and the weight left his holster. He glanced over his shoulder. Both men were husky and wide and both wore mackinaws and heavy woolen pants jammed into high-top boots.

Both also wore woolen caps, earflaps tied over the tops. Both had big thick faces and dark beards.

Bill thought, *Brother, I sure walked*

into it, easy as shootin' a cougar up a tree.

"We take him to camp," one man said.

"Why not kill him here. Save grub?"

Bill didn't like this kind of talk. They went into some foreign language and he would have given his eye-teeth to have understood their conversation. He wondered what he would fight with, for he aimed to fight. He had a plan built—he would drop to his knees, grab a rock and throw it. He picked out the rock—a round one, lying by his right boot.

Both kept rifles on him. The one had picked up Bill's rifle; he had it under his left arm, the barrel pointing down. He had Bill's .45 stuck under his wide belt, handle up.

Bill Jones had nothing for himself but self-reproach. He had blundered ahead like a jackass with the blind staggers, he figured.

He listened to them. They did not appear to be arguing. Rather, they were discussing something, and they did not get excited—they kept their voices down.

Bill wondered if they had seen him paddle in with the small launch. He hoped not. To get off this island he had to have a boat.

Occasionally a word of English crept into their conversation, and he got the gist of it—they were discussing in cold tones whether to murder him or make him captive.

This was indeed a cheering thought.

He also heard other English words, and one of these phrases was this: *the other man.* Could they mean Matt Smith?

Hope flared through him.

The second man, he found out, was named Fedor.

Finally, their conversation concluded, Olaf spoke to Fedor, this time in broken English. "You walk with your rifle in his back. I carry his rifle and watch from back here."

"I do that."

Bill had hoped that Olaf would select the chore of herding him toward their camp. Olaf had the extra rifle and this made him awkward. But Fedor came close and jammed his rifle's end against Bill's back.

And Bill had a chance; by so doing, Fedor erred.

Bill thought, *I have to take this chance,* and he exploded into action. He twisted on his boots, cat-quick, and Fedor let the hammer fall, but the bullet drummed into space; for when Bill had twisted he had also knocked the rifle barrel to one side, a trick he had been taught while in game-warden training. An old trick, also an army trick.

Elation ran through him, exciting and strong. The first part of his plan had worked. Now, the plan called that he lunge in, wrestle with Fedor for the rifle, for he needed a rifle. And by keeping in close to the burly man, Olaf would not dare shoot—for if he shot he would also hit his partner.

Fedor had lunged ahead. Now he was turning the rifle. Bill bulled in, grabbing the rifle with both hands, one hand on the barrel, the other on the stock. And he brought up his right knee into Fedor's belly.

Fedor grunted, and Bill twisted the rifle, and the hammer fell. Fedor hollered, the scream cutting through the roar of the seals, who paid not a bit of attention to man's fight—they had a fight of their own. Bill had the rifle, then, and Fedor was falling, shot through the chest.

He had not been able to keep an eye on Olaf. Luck had been with him, his plan had worked, and now if he could eliminate—

He heard the vicious *swish* of the rifle's stock. He caught a glimpse of the stock coming in from his right. He also glimpsed Olaf standing there, legs wide, swinging the rifle, holding onto the barrel.

Then the stock smashed him on the side of the head.

And Bill Jones, game-warden, floated out onto a black and silent sea, the sounds of the fighting bull seals disappearing in the feathery darkness...

THROUGH this blackness at last came a thought, and it was this: *I killed one of them.* This thought was pushed aside by full consciousness and Bill Jones tried to put his hands up to his throbbing head, but he couldn't do this because his hands were tied behind him.

He tried to get to his feet, and he could not do this, either—his feet were bound hard together.

The blackness persisted penning him in. He realized then he lay in a black dungeon. He smelled earth, and hard earth was under him.

He closed his eyes, memory flooding him.

"Bill!"

The voice came from outer blackness. Bill recognized it. He managed to get in a sitting position with his back against the earth wall. This also helped his head clear, too.

"Damn it," he said.

"Bill Jones, am I glad to see you."

Bill's eyes became accustomed to the dark. The face was about a foot away. Bill finally saw it somewhat clearly. Gray stubble on thin, sunken cheeks.

"You're an ugly sight, Matt Smith."

"Thank God, Bill, you're okay."

"How do you know I'm okay, you old fool?"

"You can insult a man," Matt said.

Bill said, "I'd put an arm around you but my arms are tied. I'd put both arms around you, Matt, if I could."

"I'd do the same."

Bill shook his head slowly. "I better stop that. I might shake my head plumb off my shoulders. I can still see thet rifle stock whammin' down on my poor little head."

"Tell your uncle, Bill?"

"Okay, *Grandpa.*"

Bill Jones told old Matt the whole story, starting from his departure point in Flagstaff, down in Arizona Territory. Good old Flagstaff! Hot as hell come summer, but good old Flagstaff! Would he ever see Flagstaff again?

"Thing that I ponder about, Mattie boy, is this: How come they never kilt us right off the bat?"

"I think I got that answered."

"Yeah?"

"A U. S. Game Warden is a purty important fella to Uncle Sam. And if one of them is murdered, there'd be hell to pay. Even if the gents what murdered him come from another country, like this outerfit does."

"You mean they don't dare kill us?"

"No, they aim to kill us, for damned sure. But they'll do it at sea—where they can weight down the bodies—where there'll be no grave to find."

"Then they're waitin' to haul us out to sea and dump us overboard, huh?"

"That's the way she looks to me, Biller boy."

"When will this happen?"

"When they clean up this herd of fur seals. Might take a few days—they might pull stakes tonight— I been trailin' this outfit across a number of islands now and they trapped me just about like they snared you."

"Two stupid jassaxes, Matt."

"Well, a man cain't win all the time."

"We're goin' to win this. I'll be damned if I want some old codfish nibbling on my big toe and him with a happy look in his eyes."

"Yeah, we gotta git out—but how?"

BUT HOW? Those two words were the big words, the necessary words. Bill leaned his aching head back against the wall, but that hurt him at the point where Olaf's swinging riflestock had made harsh contact.

He gave their predicament deep and painful thought. He hoped they had not found his motor launch. He doubt-

ed if they could find it—he had really piled brush over it and around it. This mental point reached, he put his mind on his tied hands. And he remembered he had teeth.

Good teeth, too, with just a few fillings.

He got sick—swirlingly sick—and he almost passed out again. He gathered his strength and said, "A man can't tell whether it is night or day in this dungeon."

"Night all the time, Bill."

Bill said, "I got good teeth. I wonder what they got your wrists tied with—rope or rawhide?"

"Feels like rawhide to me."

Bill said, "Let's play a little game, Grandpa."

"Uncle," Matt Smith corrected.

They got on their sides. Bill got his teeth around the throngs on the game-warden's wrists. The rawhide tasted terrible. He had chewed idly on rawhide taken from cows, and it did not taste like this.

"Thet must be whale hide," Matt Smith said.

Bill said, "You're a damned fool. Transferrin' from the warm country around Tucson to up here in this god-forsaken cold hell."

"I like it here."

"Eskimo women?"

"They is some beauties, Bill. They like a man, even if he is old, if he's got money."

"They do that all over the world," Bill said. "Lay still, or I'll gnaw your hand off for breakfast. Man alive, I'm ga'nt. When do they feed us?"

"When the notion strikes them."

"What do they feed you?"

"You can have any dish you want, as long as it is rice."

"I hate rice."

"You'll *love* this rice!"

THE RICE was served by another short man with heavy clothing. He carried a lantern and for the first time Bill clearly saw the interior of his new home—a cave hacked out of the earth with planks over it and dirt on these. About eight by ten, he figured. *Inside measurements,* he thought cynically.

"How we gonna eat that with our hands tied?" Bill wanted to know.

The man had dished the gruel into two wooden saucers. Now he lifted his lantern and the bucket of gruel and grinned.

"Mouth," he said.

Then he was gone. Bill listened and heard a lock snap on the door. The opening of the door had momentarily let the roar of the seal herd enter. Bill gave his attention to the gruel.

"Stinks."

"You'll eat it...when you get hungry."

Old Matt Smith was on his knees, bent over with his mouth sucking the rice. Bill ate in a similar fashion. The rice tasted vile, and had some fat element in it.

"Whale grease," Matt explained.

"Hell of a hotel," Bill said. "No accommodations. Hard bunks and rotten chuck and poor service."

"Start chawin' again, William?"

The rawhide tasted even more terrible than the rotten grub. Bill almost lost his rice, but he kept on chewing. There was nothing else to do. Occasionally he chewed Matt Smith's skin and flesh. Smith did not seem to care. Bill realized the old game-warden had been trussed so long in this dark dungeon that he was close to the breaking point, close to slipping in dark and babbling madness.

Bill realized he wanted to get Matt free before the next feeding period. Matt had tried to chew at his, Bill's, bonds. But the old man had only a few teeth. He could do nothing in the line of working like a beaver.

Although he did not feel like joking, he kept up a running line of banter. They had to joke or old Matt would slip across the line.

It seemed days later that the first strip was chewed through. But this did not free the old man because of the peculiarity of the knot.

"Loosened the pressure, though," Matt Smith said.

Most of the time the old game-warden slept. He would wake up screaming. The screams were terrible. Then he would quiet down again and Bill would become a human beaver. Bill wondered if his teeth had not become worn down, like those of an old beaver.

Ages and ages later, he had Matt's hands separated.

"Now untie me, Matt."

"I can't move my hands."

"Blood will come into them."

"I can't move—them, Bill."

Bill waited, lying on his side. The old man could move his arms, but he could not make his fingers work. Bill got scared. If the guard came in—found old Matt's arms at his side—and old Matt could do nothing—

"Try hard, Matt."

But the old man could not make his fingers move. He could not make his hands bend at the wrists or knuckles.

Bill felt the keen and bitter irony of the moment. He implored, he pleaded. he tried to massage the hands with his forehead—but the fingers would not move, the wrists were in cement casts.

"Here comes the chuck," Matt Smith said. "We got to make a try, Bill."

Bill said, "Here goes nothing."

He hobbled to the door, jumping like a rabbit with a broken leg. He stood up along the wall beside the door, hopelessness flooding him. The key found the lock, the lantern-light stabbed in as the guard entered.

Bill thought, *This is it.*

Knees bent, hands and feet tied, Bill Jones lurched ahead, a compact ball. He hit the guard from behind, shoulder smashing between his shoulderblades. Then he was catapulting forward, the guard going down. Bill could not stop his lunging attack, and he hit the far wall.

HE ROLLED over, a hopeless feeling in him—he had failed. He tried to get to his feet, but he fell down. Lying there, he watched. The lantern lay on its side, but luckily no oil came from it. But he was not interested in the lantern. Startled, he watched old Matt beat up on the guard.

Matt sure could use his hands, now.

They were fists, those skinny, bony hands. A moment ago, they had been useless, paralyzed; they had hung worthless on the wrists. But something had been summoned out of the dark regions wherein Man finds his greatness, and this something had given those hands life. This had made them into hard fists that now beat the guard on the face.

Bill hurriedly crossed the strip, kicking himself forward with his knees, chest on the ground. He had to shut the door so the cries of the guard would not be heard. This he did by rolling against the heavy plank door.

"Work him over, Matthew boy!"

The guard had lost his pistol. Bill got it with difficulty, holding it behind him, and he got his firefinger of his right hand through the trigger-guard. He must have looked foolish, lying there on his side, trying to hold the pistol solid, looking over his shoulder. His fingers were as numb as old socks.

The guard kicked, and old Matt flew backwards. He hit the wall, and this almost knocked him out, and the guard got to his feet.

"By the hell—"

He never finished. He threw back his head, tried to scream, but no sound came; and even if he had made a sound, the roar of the pistol there in those close confines would never have allowed the cry to be heard.

"You—you shot him, Billy?"

"I was lucky, Matt."

Stink, powdersmoke stink. Good old powdersmoke.

"You killed him, Bill?"

"He ain't moved. He's got a knife."

"They might have heard the bullet-roar, Bill."

"Get his knife. Work fast, Matt. You can use your hands, eh?"

"I can use them, but not good."

Sing, Knife, sing against rawhide. Cut, Knife, cut the rawhide. Lord, my wrists—the rawhide has cut deep into them. And my ankles—man alive, will I ever walk, can I ever walk?

But both of you are free, Bill Jones. Yes, free!

THEY WENT outside, two bearded animals, both limping. Back of them fire danced across the earth floor of their dungeon, a yellow tongue moving close to the dead seal poacher. Bill had kicked the lantern and had broken the bowl.

They were in the entrance. The moon was up, the bull-seals roared, the breakers broke—they were long and capped with white and they smashed into the outside barrier, beating endlessly on igneous rock. Then they retreated, gathered strength from the tons of water behind them, and they smashed the rocks again, and this mingled with the roar of the bulls fighting for their cows.

Bill said, huskily, "They never heard the report."

"Their shacks are some distance off...maybe that is why?"

"Reckon so, Grandpa."

"*Uncle,*" Matt corrected. "Damn it, not *grandpa!*"

"Okay, grandpa."

"Damn it, I give up!"

"So do I," Bill said.

"Wonder if they found the launch?"

Bill said, "You came here by boat, huh? Then they captured you when you landed, like they did me. What about your boat?"

"They blew it up."

"With what?"

"Dynamite."

Bill said, "Get thee behind me, Satan, and push like hell."

Old Matt looked at him. "You gone loco, *Grandson?*"

Bill summed it up. He was sure they had found the launch. That meant they had no way to escape from this island. He was staring at a point out in the white-caps.

"Looks like a small vessel to me," he said.

Old Matt squinted. "It is just that. About an eighth of a mile out, too. Too big to get closer to shore because of the reef. They must be moving out their hides."

"Here comes a rowboat in," Bill said.

"Let's get out of here."

Soon they were in the buckbrush along the water's edge. Bill had spent a bad moment when they had scurried across the clearing toward the brush for they were clearly visible from the two lean-to cabins made of sticks and mud, evidently the hangout of the seal poachers. He had locked the door behind him and a glance inside had showed him that the fire had burned out.

Three men went by after they had heard the keel of the boat scrape the beach. They were big men, all dressed in warm clothing.

Then they were gone, moving up the path and out of sight.

Bill said, "Three and one make four."

"That's the size of the camp, I think."

Bill said, "Wonder where the dynamite is?"

"In their camp, I suppose."

"We could never sneak in and get it," Bill said.

"They must be breaking camp, Bill."

Soon the three came tramping back. Each of the first two carried a bunch

of pelts. They put these in the boat. Then the third put in a box. Bill thought, *Dynamite?*

They talked but Bill could not, of course, understand their language. Then they went back for more pelts.

They were scarcely out of sound and sight when Bill Jones had the box. His heart jumped—*dynamite!*

"Now we blow up their boat," he said.

"How we gonna get out there?"

"We got a boat here, ain't we?"

"They'll miss it."

"Let them miss it."

WITH LABOR, old Matt got into the rowboat, and Bill pushed it off the sand and leaped in, rowing like mad along the edge of the water where the brush hid him. They had to get out of sight before the three brought back another load of furs. Bill rowed with all his strength and speed. The boat cut through the water and the darkness hid it.

Old Matt said, "Dynamite," and kissed the wooden box.

"You know how to handle it?"

"Used to work with your dad in the Globe mines."

"Good."

Old Matt said, "They'll see that door locked. They'll break in and find the guard dead, and the dungeon empty. They'll know we stole their boat."

"Let them holler."

"They'll be penned on the island."

"Good. And we'll have the ship."

"They might have the launch hid out, Bill."

"If they have, they'll head right for the ship pronto."

"I guess that is right."

Bill rowed around an out-thrusting boulder, then headed across straight for the ship. The high waves lifted the boat, dumped it into a trough, then lifted it. The island was a mere dark line in the moonlight. He knew that the poachers could not see the boat.

They came close to the poacher's ship, which was about eighty-feet long—a snug low craft. Bill said, "There's the launch."

There it was, tied to the vessel, riding the swells. Bill stood up while old Matt kept the rowboat close to the vessel, and Bill boosted the box of dynamite on deck.

"You go and fix it, Matt. I don't know how."

"Help me, Bill?"

Bill boosted the old man over the rail, and heard him hit the deck. The rowboat slipped out, and Bill pulled it in close again, hanging onto the rim of the deck. At this moment a man poked his head up, coming into the cabin. Bill laid the .45 across the deck rail.

He shot once. The man staggered out, fell on the deck. By this time old Matt had his feet under him.

"Wonder if there are any more around?"

"Get his gun...from his belt."

Old Matt scooped up the automatic. He said, "There's a boat coming from the island. They've had another boat cached there. Rowboat, looks like. Wonder why they never used our launch."

"Might be out of gas. Might not know how to run it."

Bill was on deck now, pistol in hand.

"That ain't no rowboat," he said. "That's a gasoline motor I hear."

"Comin' fast, too."

"Get that powder set. I'll check the launch. Shoot to kill if anybody gets in your way."

THE OLD man, carrying the box of dynamite, disappeared in the cabin. Bill found three rifles in the cabin. He scooped these up and got some boxes of ammunition on the shelf and looked at the approaching boat.

They were coming at a good lick.

He threw the rifles and the ammunition in the launch and went down

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It was spring, and Digger John was still young enough to have fancies, still romantic enough to be taken for a sucker by a pretty face. That's how he found himself fighting the famous Boston Tom Chew after a rugged night of wild-goose chasing . . .

DIGGER JOHN--SLICKERED

by A. A. BAKER

DIGGER JOHN loosened his wide leather belt a notch, shrugged the tautness out of his red shirt, backed up to the tailgate of the freight wagon, then nodded to the blacksmith.

"Can you hold it?" asked the smith. "Can you hold it till I get this iron hubbed wheel off and a block under the axle?"

The huge miner nodded, his hands feeling for purchase. Digger lifted and the axle came up. The blacksmith expertly hammered the hub to loosen the heavy wheel and vibrations flowed along Digger's shoulders. It felt good and the ropey muscles coiled as strength raced warmly through his arms.

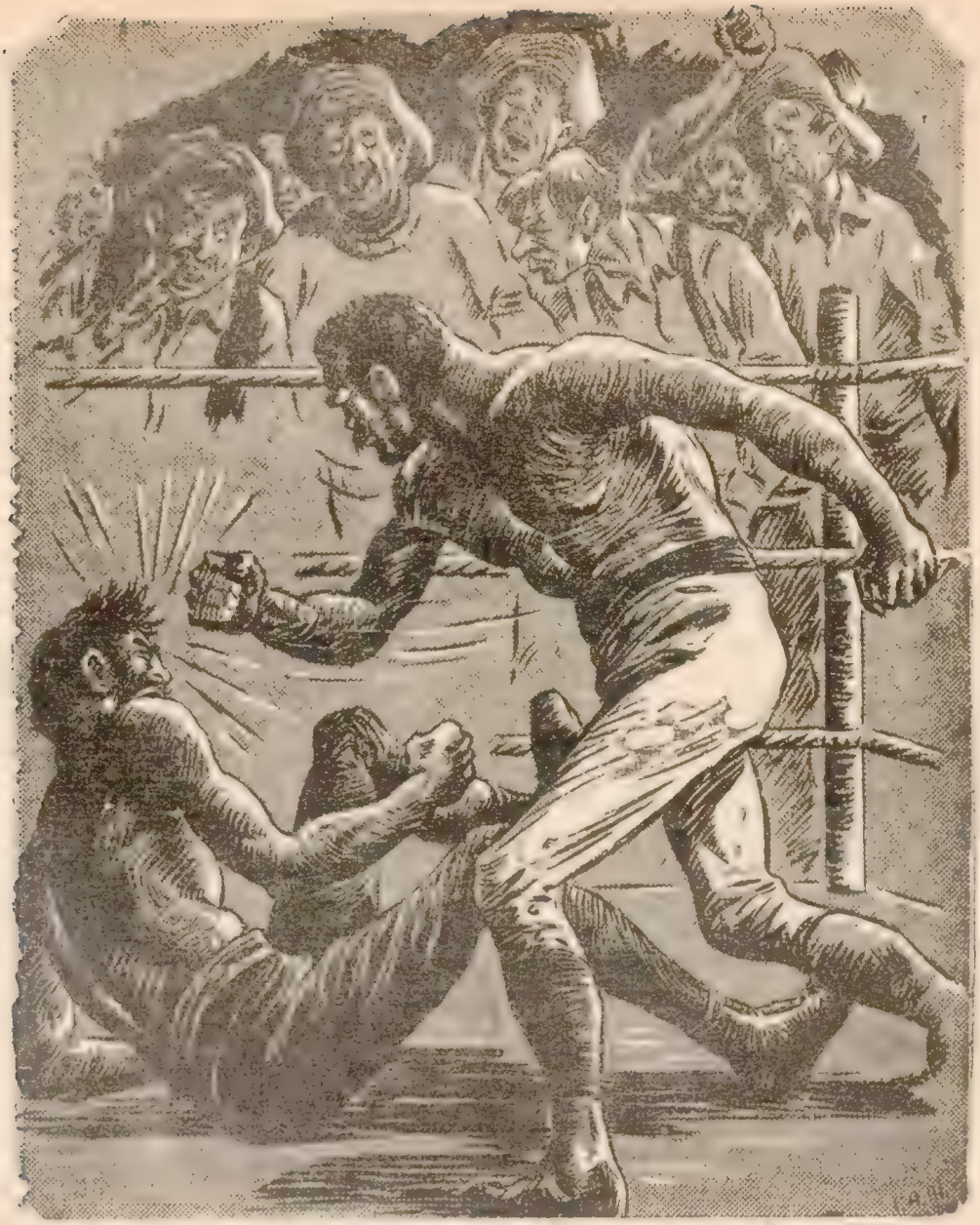
It was spring in the Sierras, and Digger looked up Gold Run's main street. The falsefronts set off the three-storied hotel. Cold Spring Mountain, fresh in vibrant foliage, towered over the mining town, letting a fresh breeze drift down. Bullwhip Annie, the Sierra's woman teamster, strong legs dangling over the lip of her low porch, could be seen shelling new peas into a battered pan. Her long lashes, blonde in the sun, rose from her task to watch the two men working on her wagon. *She'd be pretty,* Digger ruminated, *outa them teamster clothes an' into somethin' spangley.*

The eastbound stage, four hours out of Marysville, was rattling up from lower town. Digger noticed the cocky trot of the horses. Even those steaming horses felt good, he thought, just as he was feeling good with the weight of the axle pointing up the strength in warm muscles on a spring day.

"Digger!" the stage driver shouted. A friend shouting to a friend, no more needed—just "Digger!"

The miner smiled tipping his bushy head up in acknowledgement; feeling the weight cramp gently. *Ah, nice,* he thought. *Joe the stage driver, Ollie the blacksmith and the warm sun. Getting something done. Changing a wheel. A man giving his friend a hand . . .*

The stage was passing. A long black arm, elbow hooked over the sill, dangled a half empty whiskey bottle. The face appearing under the brown derby was flushed, black eyebrows raised quizzically. Digger watched the arm raise and was unable to move. The bottle flashed, the corn liquor, sloshing yellowly through the glass churned as it left the passenger's hand. Digger ducked his head against his straining



Boston Tom Chew was as strong as ever, and Digger was being knocked down more and more often...

shoulder. He had one glimpse of Ollie; the smith had the wheel off and was half under the wagon, flexing a stubborn wood block under the exposed axle end.

The bottle struck Digger against the temple. He fought against the rush of pain; felt his hands loosening, his nails scratching the hard wood. He wanted to shout at Ollie but his jaws wouldn't open. The pain of the bottle blow reddened his brain and took away his vision. Digger knew he was falling. Dimly, he heard a scream of pain and wondered if he was shouting. Then he blacked out.

DIGGER came to. He was laid out in the shade of the careened wagon. Rising on an elbow he savored the taste of whiskey and looked for the blacksmith. Ollie, blood trickling from a smashed hand, grinned past Annie's administering shoulder.

Digger John rose on his toes and looked out over the crowd. The stage

had halted in front of the hotel. "Take care of Ollie," his voice was harsh.

"T—they're looking for the doctor," Ollie chattered, fighting to grit his teeth. "You go do what you got to, Dig." The smith's eyes wavered toward the stage.

The wide doors of the hotel entrance was blocked by a clutter of luggage. Digger ducked past the lobby entrance and hit the batwings of the saloon, raising a shoulder to avoid their backswing and was inside the barroom.

For several seconds his eyes lashed around the room, its dimness offset by the polished bottles lined even with the back mirror. The blackbrowed man, his sleeve showing a jewel-studded cufflink against stained brown cambric, was pouring a drink. At the end of the bar, grousing morosely with saloon owner, Dredger Dan, was the irate stagedriver. A young woman, billowing skirt covered by a linen travel duster, a red feather jaunty on a tiny hat atop her black hair, was standing calmly in front of the cold stove. She slapped one long glove fretfully. Digger was suddenly aware of the rising welt over his eye. Unconsciously, he brushed the street dust from his jeans.

"You!" Digger snapped to the man with the bottle. "You throw that bottle?" The man turned reddened eyes; white scars edged his lids and as he opened his mouth large crooked teeth showed.

"A mistake. . ." the explanation came out of the dimness of the room and Digger turned. A fat man, nervously pawing his green cummerbund with ringed fingers, was the explainer.

"Tom, there—and that's *Boston* Tom Chew," he said it like the name was important, "Tom's been drinking; I'm Blaine, his manager." The fat man turned helpless eyes toward the girl, and she moved her red lips and wrinkled her smooth brow in irritation.

Digger scowled. "Drinkin'? How much you figure he's had?"

"A full pint!" frowned the girl. "He's not himself. Father, talk to that driver again. We *can't* be stranded here."

"A pint?" Digger moved away from the batwings, shouldered up to Tom Chew. "A whole pint? Can't hold yore likker, eh?"

The red eyes inspected the miner as their owner laid heavy knuckled hands around his glass; then jabbed an elbow into Digger's ribs. Hard.

"Dredger," the miner ignored the rib-jab. "Set me up a full pint; I'm gettin' down to this ranny's level."

As the bottle slapped down, Blaine was back to his arguing with the stagedriver. The girl was silently watching as Digger John opened the pint. He gasped once, drew a breath, watching Tom Chew sip from the glass. Then up went the bottle again and was almost immediately slapped back onto the bar, empty. Digger cocked a big right fist. He aimed the fist at Chew's jaw, but the arm was disobedient. Whiskey fumes blurred his eye, causing a cough to rise. Chew moved his head smoothly, standing away from Digger with ridged arms raised. Chew braced, smashed a hard right into Digger's face.

DIGGER felt his nosebone shift, knew it was broken. Half-strangled on the gulped whiskey, he pulled his chin against his shoulder as Chew aimed another clubbing right hand. Chew's fist landed against the swollen right eye. Digger reached out blindly, catching a hold on the fighter's shirtcuff. Rolling up the cloth, Digger bent his fist against the man's wrist and yanked. He felt the cords in the wrist creak and shook off some of his own blinding pain. Loosing the cuff and boring in, Digger was now calm. Chew met him, forearms flailing from broad shoulders.

For a full ten minutes it was a street fight. Chew was strong, taking each of Digger's smashes then returning with powerful swings that blasted on Digger's broken nose and knotted eye.

Dimly, he heard men shouting and knew the room was littered with smashed furniture. Once he distinctly heard the click of the girl's heels as she dodged the surging pair. Digger had met his match; Chew was strong. A poised, oiled, professional machine. Digger felt a blow in the stomach and, sickened by the gulped whiskey, became crafty. He started exposing his battered face, drawing the fighter in. Taking several chopping jabs, he waited to slash out; needing his opponent close.

Chew stepped up his attack. Digger John knew it was now or never. He lowered his shoulder, drooped his right fist, poured strength into the arm and as the knuckles grazed the sawdust floor, slammed upward and caught Chew at the second vest button. Air shot out of Chew's lungs and his face went blank; leaning he reached out for the bar.

Digger John straightened and yelled, "This is for Ollie!" then chopped the falling man behind the ear. The man went down, the fight was over.

"Now, get him outa here!" It was Dredger Dan shouting at Blair. "Wrecked my saloon! Damn it, get him outa Gold Run!"

"But—but he's Boston Tom Chew!" whinned Blaine. "We're filling engagements going east. Next engagement in Elko..."

"Then get him back onto the stage; that's where it's headed." Dredger glared at Digger John who was gently probing his broken nose and wincing. "Blaine," Dredger dropped his voice in threat, "all winter we had trouble with this crazy Digger John. He's mostly grizzly bear dressed like a miner. He's the trickiest critter in the world. Spent the danged winter plaguing the whole town with his hoo-rahin'. Now comes spring, he's smilin'. Then *you* bring this livin' ape here—gettin' the grizzly all worked up. *We* got to live with him; you can go. Now get back onto that stage!"

"Father..." The girl, white reams of underskirt brushing the sawdust, spoke from a kneeling position. "Tom's ribs are broken. Broken by this grizzly."

"He'll have to rest." Blaine turned to Dredger. "Have you rooms?"

"Not for him," shouted Dredger. "Get him outa here..."

"Then what's the nearest town?"

"Marysville," yelled the stagedriver. "A down-stage's coming through soon, take him back there. *I* ain't hauling him no further!"

Blaine turned a stricken face toward the girl, his mouth forming the word, "Beth."

"Remember," she lowered her head, "I'm through if we go back."

"But what can we do?" her father whined.

"We won't argue in public." Her face was stormy as he drew her to the end of the room. There they talked for long minutes. Digger watched them over a filled glass. He saw the girl fling her father's arm from hers and stalk back, planting herself defiantly in front of Dredger Dan.

"Does that get-out order include me?"

"Well—no. Just that Boston Tom, and..." he added... "that fella Blaine, even if he is yore Pa. You can stay ma'am." He turned affable. "Ain't had a looker in Gold Run since Hangtown's Shirt-tail Follies was here. Only real lady we got is Bullwhip Annie, an' she ain't been outa britches since..." He coughed. "I'll show you a room."

The hotel owner waddled ahead of Beth Blaine and mounted the stairs. The girl, long skirt posed for her turn, ran brown eyes over the room and halted on Digger John. "He had it coming, Digger; it was long overdue. I'd see a doctor about that nose."

Digger John tried to extend his little finger around the glass, gulped and felt the whiskey streak up his nasal passage. He stood there, tears leaking

from his bruised eyes, watching Beth Blair make her dainty way up the stairs.

FOR A FULL day Beth Blaine stayed in her room. Digger John paced the squeaky hotel porch. He had located a plantation style black hat and borrowed a string tie from Slim Deakins, Gold Run's honest gambler. He had shaved, leaving plus red sideburns along his muscled jaw. His mouth held an unlighted cigar, its thin length jauntily rearing up along the swollen bump on his broken nose. The barber had worked over his eye, pasting a cigaret paper over the cut and tinting it with a flesh colored dye. Digger strutted in the strange tight pants laced under the instep of his polished boots.

"Just slickered up steada likkered up!" boomed Annie. But her new spangled shirtwaist decorating her angular frame took the bite from her comment.

Then on the second morning, Beth Blaine walked out. The sun haloed her brown hair as her red lips parted in greeting. "What's going on in the back rooms?"

The question caught the mooning Digger short. He snorted, clinking a stack of gold coins in his heavy hands. "You—you're lookin' mighty pert," he finally blurted.

"You're pretty too, Digger."

She smiled and the miner ducked his head to hide a blush then spoke swiftly. "Ah, they're just raisin' a fight back there. Since I fought Boston Tom they're tryin' to match us up. You know, like puttin' two men in a bull pen. Mostly for bettin' purposes."

"Sober, he's a real fighter." She spoke doubtfully, causing Digger's face to fall. "But," she added confidently, "I think you could beat him —drunk or sober."

The big man beamed. "Tell them that. They're thinkin' I'd get whupped, an' so they're toe-dancin' about settin' up the fight. Figure..."

"Would you like to show me around Johnny?" She brushed aside all talk of the prize fight. Digger jumped up, offered his arm and guided her down the boardwalk.

Later, Slim Deakins strode slowly behind the excited Dredger Dan and found Digger cleaning up his burro corral. Dredger spluttered, "We talked to that Blaine girl, Digger. She's seen Tom Chew in all his fights, and says maybe you can whip Chew...!"

"She said that?" Digger jabbed the pitchfork into a corner post and smacked the handle till it sang.

"Yeah," grinned Dredger. "She sure did. Now listen. You got to train for this fight..." The little man went on explaining but the miner was absorbed in more delirious subject matter. "They's a syndicate," the words brought Digger out of his haze, "from San Francisco. Bettin' men." The big miner realized that it was Slim Deakins who was talking now and listened intently as the gambler continued.

"Now we know the mountain folks —miners, skin hunters and such, will lay their bets on you, Digger. The only way we can get opposition money is to spread the word down around the bay. Bring in fresh money. We're figuring to do just that..."

"What'd I care?" grinned Digger. "I whupped him onct, didn't I?"

"But," Slim was doubtful, "that was a saloon fight. Before we get in too deep, we want to know if you think you can take him again. It isn't that we want a sure thing; we're sort of thinking about you, Dig. If you lose, and the mountain money goes down the drain, you'll maybe have to leave the country. Those Everhard boys on the North Fork strung up a man who brought in a bear and lost to a Marysville bull, and..."

"Aw, shucks," grinned Digger. "*She* said I could; she ought to know, Beth ought."

"But Bullwhip Annie—she saw Chew fight in Sacramento—says Tom Chew'll chop you down."

Digger frowned. "She says that?"

Dredger Dan took over. "Yes. And we ain't sure this ain't just a setup; seems all mighty queer. A man's daughter doesn't leave with him but stays on in Gold Run. Maybe she's buildin' it all up..."

"Don't you go no farther!" snapped Digger. "You jest get the fight arranged. Annie's," he smirked, "jest a mite put out counta I've been... Aw, you know!"

THE FIGHT was arranged. A committee was dispatched to Marysville to fix the date. Signs were printed and the fight was promulgated over the Northern Mines. Dredger Dan threw up a lean-to behind the hotel to house extra guests and ordered fresh whiskey stocks.

Miners, waiting for the water to slacken from melting snows, hiked into Gold Run flush with their winter's take. Weaverville Chinese, betting professionals, slippered quietly in to study the muscle-hardening gyrations of Digger John. San Francisco gamblers sent advance men; they, too, watched the big miner soaking his strong hands in salt water. Watched him, fists taped with rawhide strips, smack the canvas covered pine log swinging from the overhang of the stable. And they watched his feet shift as he struck out against a dancing sparring partner. These gamblers smiled as he lowered his head to protect his healing nose and cut eye; they bet on Boston Tom and found takers. Rib-thin miners bet their winter's poke of skin money. The Everhard clan rode in from North Fork, sullenly eyed the prancing Digger and grudgingly nodded approval, then slapped bags of gold onto Slim Deakins' betting table. This was matched by silk-shirted, florid-faced men from down below.

Beth Blaine tripped daily to the training camp. She leaned against the corral post and smiled encouragement as Digger soaked in the sun and stepped up his effort. Reports filtered in from Marysville. Distorted rumors added to by each word passer. Boston Tom had killed a sparring partner with his deadly neck chop; Boston Tom's ribs were being encased in a steel corset. He was grafting steel needles under his finger nails. But Digger John shrugged aside the rumors, taking long walks over the poppy strewn hillsides. Gently lifting the woman over the winter snags that blocked her small boots. "Her Johnny" stayed away from the saloons, drinking nothing but milk spiced with a light wine. He would leave her at the hotel at an early hour, then resolutely stomp off to bed.

The weeks passed. Gold Run swelled with visitors. A ring, braced solidly with logs and springy with two-by-eight flooring, rose in front of the hotel. Flags stretched across the wide street. The teamster's camp was filled and wagons stretched back over the far side of Forgotten Creek. Gold bets had long since overburdened the hotel safe and were stacked in the lobby with a twenty-four rifle guard. Slim Deakins chalked the bets on a huge blackboard running the full length of the lobby. The coin and gold dust was packed into buckskin bags, each weighed a hundred pounds. Slim slept in the lobby, guarding the chalked figures on his betting board. Dredger Dan spent his spare time keeping suspicious track of Beth Blaine, but she smiled her way into the hearts of the mountain men. Several letters arrived from her father by stage, but these she carelessly stacked on her dressing table where Dredger's prying eyes scanned the missles filled with parental greetings and future plans in the east.

THE DAY before the fight, on the eve of a spring storm, Boston Tom and his manager arrived. Beth visited for an hour then rented a gentle mare from the stable and rode out along. Several hours after she left, the storm blew in from the summit. Lightning

cracked, splitting black clouds. A flash flood scoured spongy ridges down Cold Spring Mountain. Blaine paced the hotel porch, his suit a mess under the dripping eaves, worriedly watching the road from lower town. Digger John joined him and bit vicious questions at passersby. As the afternoon passed, search parties straggled out but Beth Blaine had been swallowed by the storm.

Dusk dropped and the storm held. Then Digger broke from his advisors and tramped out of town. Throughout the night he raged over the mountains, dragging through flooded creeks and slashing through the stubby manzanita then crawling up the slushy mud of Cold Spring Mountain. Digger shouted at deserted cabins, glaring over the towering black trees that were lighted by each flash of lightning. Other searchers, drifting back into Gold Run, told of the frantic search by the raving miner. The mountains were a cave with a million tunnels; dark distorted shadows springing at the distraught man. Digger felt like someone trapped on a mud-soaked battlefield, feeling each black rock with clammy hands, as though it were a corpse. At dawn, hopeful of news, he staggered back into Gold Run. His rimmed eyes stoney as he was told that Beth had not been found. Gulping a drink he turned again toward the mountains steaming under the renewed sun. As he turned he stared, then joyously watched a horse and rider trotting gaily up onto the main street. It was Beth Blaine.

"Good Lord, Beth!" Digger hurried forward, clutching at the reins of the startled mare. "What happened to you?"

"We were lost," her words were crisp. "We were lost for a while. Then when the storm came, we found a tunnel and spent the night." She smiled coolly. "This animal was upset from the smell of a bear." Ruefully, she indicated her muddy boots. "I had to lead him for miles..."

Blaine burst through the crowd, clasped his daughter in a hug and led her away. "Beth," his words drifted back, "we've got to get out of this wild country! We're leaving for Boston this very afternoon, right after the fight."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Blaine." It was Bullwhip Annie. "You think our battered hulk is in any shape to fight today?" She had a hand hooked fiercely into Blaine's coat collar, glaring down into the man's face.

"That's *his* choice!" shouted Blaine angrily. "We're leaving today—fight or no fight. If he wants out, say so. And," he pulled loose from Annie to address the crowd. "The fight was set for today. If your sniffling Sierra men want it called off—say so! But don't pull any tough stuff on *me*. Boston Tom can whip him with one hand cut off—now or next week."

"It was done de-liberate!" keened Annie. "This fluff was left here to mesmerize Digger."

"Aw, now, Annie," Digger John interrupted. "Don't get het up. Couple hours sleep an' I'll be all right. Fight'll go on..."

"Very well," snapped Blaine. "And you," he pointed a threatening finger at Digger, "stay away from my daughter!"

"Leave her say that," growled Digger.

"Oh, Daddy's so right," it was the tinkling voice of Beth Blaine.

DIGGER'S mouth dropped, he raised shaking fingers to his eyes, slowly drew the salt hardened hands down his whitened cheeks, turned and stomped toward his adobe. He knew the truth, now. Annie had been right; Blaine had capitalized on the saloon brawl. Had left his daughter behind in Gold Run to wind her way into his affections—and, Digger smiled thinly, she had done it! Then when the bets were down, she'd worn him out with an all night mountain search. The Frisco gamblers, coldly laying their gold

on Boston Tom, were on the inside. All right; a worried twinkle jumped into his eyes, there were several ways to skin a cat. He spun about.

"Annie!" Digger waved Bullwhip Annie over.

"Want me, Dig?"

"Yep. You ever do any flirtin'?"

"Some." Bullwhip Annie grinned. "But wait'll after the fight, Dig..."

"Naw," he muttered, "not me. We been flum-axed. Us Mountain Men has been roped into a double deal an' you got to help us out in case I lose this fight."

"*You* was flum-axed the day Beth Blaine showed up, but what'll it be..." she made a face reminiscent of Beth's smile... "*Johnny?*"

"Well, Annie, spruce up some. Then see if'n you can coax Blaine an' them other gamblers into hoistin' a few. Tip off Dredger an' he'll give you watered drinks." He leaned forward and whispered an explanation that brought a grin to Annie's generous mouth.

"Not me," she chortled, "he ain't gonna spoil my whiskey. I'll take it straight, Dig."

BOSTON TOM CHEW was a methodical fighter. His strength flowed from ridged muscles that bulked oversized biceps, giving him a vicious chop. By the tenth knockdown, Digger's jaw and neck were gory with blood from the scraping blows. The half-healed eye was torn open and the white welt on his nose had cracked away to drip blood. Boston Tom was crimson to the elbows and his knuckles were slippery.

Digger John had landed heavily, leaving red welts across Chew's midsection but he had missed the pro's round head repeatedly. Digger knew he was weakening, but was plodding like a Percheron fighting a wild stallion. He knew he would never last the full afternoon, never be able to match the Boston man in endurance. His only hope was to end it fast; he bore in.

Boston Tom caught the flailing right hand, trapped it under a sweating armpit and hammered Digger John to his knees. The timekeeper banged the gong announcing, "Knockdown. End of 11th round. Two minutes rest!"

The mob flowed away from the ring and stampeded into the barroom. Seven bartenders passed the poured glasses over the teaming heads. The drinks were gulped before crowding back to the ring. Amazed glances were flung at Bullwhip Annie who was seated on the far end of the bar, her tall frame decked out in a saloon floozy's dress.

Digger John was up, his face sponged and dripping. His eyes were sunken now and he breathed heavily as he moved into the ring center. Sympathetic comments sprang softly from the spectators. Digger had met his match; worn and wobbly he was facing Tom Chew on nerve alone. But he lasted another slashing ten minutes before Tom Chew threw tactics aside and tried to bring the fight to an end. He hammered the staggering miner around the ring; bouncing the big man off the ropes, finally driving the mountain man into a corner and pumping powerful blows against his jaw. The post creaked and Digger braced his feet shrinking away, leaning his bulk up against the ring post. It cracked and Digger, feeling it give, pushed harder. The post tore away, catapaulting Digger John, enmeshed in a tangle of ropes, to the ground. The gong rang authoratively. "End of round 12. Slosh that man off while we repair the ring."

The crowd rushed to the saloon, followed by Slim Deakins who had lifted Digger and had him propped up with a lean shoulder. "Better quit, Digger," rasped Slim.

"Mebbe," Digger grunted; "help me into the saloon till they fix the ring."

THE CROWD in the saloon parted to let Digger lean on the bar. He wiped the back of a skinned hand across his bleeding face and nodded to

the bartender, then raised his glass and glared around. He threw a disgusted look at Bullwhip Annie then hunched and sidled down near her group.

"Why ain'tcha watchin' the fight?" he demanded.

"Cause I'm in here," she caught his cue. "In here with the men."

"Men?" Digger John ranted. "Pot bellied coyotes from Frisco...!"

"Don't get rough, Mister." It was Blaine, his hand shaking and spilling his whiskey. "Do your fighting in the ring. Or have you quit?"

"Leave him be," growled Annie; "he ain't got sense enough to quit till he's ground up meat."

"Bettin' men, huh?" Digger interrupted. "Ain't a muscle in the mob." He glanced around the room eyeing the gold filled sacks of betting money then wearily stepped across the room and clutching a heavy sack with one hand, hefted it onto the bar. "Can you do that, any of you whiskey potted punks?"

"Now, Digger," Annie was off the bar facing him. "Don't insult these gentlemen no more."

"I'll give any one of you," Digger shoved her aside, "ten bucks for every bag they can hoist onto the bar."

"You're crazy! A hard, no-account loser," blurted Annie. "That ain't no trick. I'm just a woman—but I can do that."

"You can?" barked Digger.

"It'll be your gold, gentlemen, when Boston Tom finishes Johnny." Annie turned to her spiffed entourage of gamblers. "But shall I try and..." she turned to Digger. "Will you pay me ten dollars for every sack?"

"Hoist 'em up, Annie!" shouted Blaine, and was joined in a cheer of agreement from every San Francisco man present.

Annie strode to the stacked bags hefting one in each hand and with the professional knee-kick of the teamster hoisted the ten remaining bags of dust and coin onto the bar. "That's a hundred dollars you owe these men!" she shouted smugly.

"You done it." Digger hunched in surprise and embarrassment. "Slim, can you cover the deal, give 'em the money? Looks like I can't do nothin' right; ain't much of a man no more."

"Sure, Digger." Slim Deakins, a worried frown on his smooth face, dug into his pocket as the excited timekeeper stuck his head in the doorway and shouted, "Ring's fixed. Fight's on. Digger, get back there or concede..."

Slowly, Digger John climbed back into the ring and faced the Boston man. As the rounds drifted by, Digger wobbled to his feet after each knockdown. He fought back with leaden arms, fought against a blackout that deepened with each chop from Tom Chew. Thirty two rounds dragged by and Digger staggered to his feet, his face a brutally swollen mask. His heart slowly hammered against his rib cage until men swore they could see it breaking out.

On the thirty-second knockdown, Digger hooked an elbow over the lower rung, straightened his body until he was ridged and weakly flailed his fists. The judges called the fight and raised Tom Chew's hand. Swearing men slowly walked into the saloon.

A HALF HOUR passed. The gamblers caroused with delirious happiness. The gold-filled sacks, wet with spilled drinks, rested on the bar where Bullwhip Annie had hoisted them. The door burst open. Digger John, revived, his swollen eyes like burnt holes, stood in the doorway and on either side crowded the Everhard boys

"Seein' as how I lost the fight," Digger rumbled the words into the stilled room, "and you mountain folks lost bettin' on me..." he raised a hand to halt the protests... "I'm gonna pay you all every cent you lost. These men," he hooked a thumb over his shoulder, "is gonna handle the divvy. Get them sacks an' take 'em into the

lobby where Slim Deakins' has got his tally board."

"Just a second!" snarled Blaine, his whiskey-reddened eyes squinting balefully. "That's *our* gold. We won it on the fight."

"Sure you won it on the fight," answered Digger, "but I bought it offa you at the end of the 12th round—remember?"

"No such a thing," shouted Blaine. "You said you'd give us ten dollars for every bag of gold..." his voice dribbled away as the implication hit all present.

A derbied man raised a sleeve gun and aimed, but Annie, with a smoothly deft elbow, jabbed the gunhand and it blared its single slug into the ceiling.

"Aw right," Digger ordered. "Get all these no-count double-dealin', fight fixin' gamblers outa Gold Run!" The Everhards, Colts drawn, ushered the gamblers out through the hilarious crowd. Digger waved a happy hand at Bullwhip Annie and she smiled shyly back at him.

★

Kit Was A Lucky Critter

Special Feature by Bess Ritter

ALTHOUGH famous Kit Carson is one of America's living legends, few people realize that he's also considered one of the western states' luckiest men.

An example of this took place in the course of a battle with an Apache tribe. One of their bullets actually missed him by a hair: it passed through his black locks an inch from his skull.

On another occasion, a white renegade shot a rifle at him from such close range that the powder actually burned Kit's face. This was the extent of the harm done, however.

Once he dashed through a hail of arrows and rifle slugs aimed at him by fifty ambushing Comanches. Then came through unscathed.

In the course of a different battle, he was wounded by Blackfeet; but his luck didn't leave him: he escaped his pursuers and spent the night sleeping out in the snow. But instead of resulting in more injury, the cold stopped the bleeding until he could have the ugly wound dressed.

These were a few of the many reasons why 50 usually-savage Utes retreated on one occasion rather than fight it out with a man with a reputation like his. In another instance, 200 Blackfeet refused to give battle to Kit and his small band of Carson men.

He started today's western style of notching a gun to indicate a kill, by driving brass tacks into the stock of his rifle each time he felled a man face-to-face. After 18 tacks, he got tired and quit, for he was lazy in everything except fighting and hunting.

In regard to his ability in the latter department, he specialized in tracking men, and according to legend, could distinguish an Indian's tribe, age, sex, height, and weight from a mocassin print that he'd left in soft ground. Kit could recognize the hoofmarks of the horses of most Indian fighters, guides, badmen, mountaineers, and even Indian leaders.

It's interesting to note that a man who was worth so much to so many by way of regard as well as reward, was valued at exactly one penny when he was 15 years of age: it seems that he was apprenticed to a saddlemaker, and took off one morning without a word of warning. The "runaway bound boy" was promptly advertised at a reward of one cent, to show Kit how little he thought his loss was worth.

★

They called this puncher "Lightning" — because when storms came up, he really began to come to life.

BAD WEATHER MAN

by E. E. CLEMENT

LIGHTNING was a short, skinny puncher with straw colored hair and rather large blue eyes, which most of the time seemed to have a glaze on them. He was called Lightning because he never seemed to be more than half awake or half alive except in bad weather. When the sun shone and the skies were fair he was just an average cowhand, who spent most of the time looking at his shadow, as he rode along, even if he were riding fence where he was supposed to be watching for loose staples. But let a bad norther come, or any other kind of wild weather, and he was altogether different. The glaze would come off his eyes; he would sit straight in his saddle, ride like a Comanche, and he would whoop and sing, and do more work than a dozen average hands. For average hands at such times are apt to get in behind a cutbank or duck for headquarters with a toothache or something.

"What makes yuh do this-away in bad weather?" Bill Burke asked him one morning when the two were headed across White Flats in the teeth of a Norther filled with sleet, and Lightning, with the neck of his shirt open and his chin held high, was fairly roaring "Days of '49."

Lightning finished the verse he was on and jerked back, "Why, dammit, man, ever'thing what's natural gits glorified when it storms. A steer what's any good curls his tail over his back and jumps an' bellers. A hoss wuth a damn will pitch till he loosens yore teeth. Me? I'm fawty hoss power when it stawms." Then he picked up his song right where he had left off.

Lightning was a fine fellow to get

along with. He never quarreled with anybody and and glorying, as he did, in work that made everybody else lie down, he could have stayed on the U Bar as long as he wanted.

But one spring, rather late, he took a notion to go up the trail.

All the outfits within a hundred miles, except the 7A, had gone. The 7A hadn't gone for the usual reason.

Briggs, trail boss for the 7A, was a regular slave driver who treated his hands like dogs. He was always late getting started because no man with a chance to hire to anybody else would hire to him.

But though he had heard about Briggs and about the worthless hands Briggs invariably got, Lightning had decided to go up trail. So one morning, though all the U Bars did everything they could to keep him from getting into what they knew he would get into one way or another, he packed his bed and his war bag and pulled for the 7A.

Briggs had three thousand cattle to deliver up Cheyenne way by the first of September. For that drive he needed four months. He didn't have them, for it was then the fifteenth of May. Also, he needed fifteen trail hands for such a hurry drive. He had six, and on the day that Lightning came to him, absolutely no prospect of any more. The outfit was camped on one of those rocky live oak flats along the Concho when Lightning rode up to it at noon. Briggs, who was a big, iron jawed man, lay under the wagon, half drunk and half crazy at all trail hands.

"Yo're a helluva speciment," he growled, "comin' round here to twitter 'bout ridin' trail fur me. What do yuh know 'bout ridin' trail anyhow?"

That would have settled the ardor of any ordinary man. But Lightning's ardor often rose to its highest when that of ordinary men took flight.

"Awh," he said, waking up a little, but not very much, "I been a-ridin' four, five year for the U Bar. Bill Burke, he could tell yuh all 'bout me if he was here; an' he would tell yuh I'm pretty good hand 'specially in bad weather. But o' course," he added reflectively, "Bill hain't here, an' I reckon if yuh was to want to talk to him 'bout me, yuh would have to ride over there an' see him to git to talk."

It was a little over three days' hard ride to the U Bar.

Briggs, who weighed two hundred and was a very sensitive man in some ways, came cawing out from under the wagon just like a big bulldog coming out for a cat.

"What the'll," he demanded, "do yuh mean makin' sich a fool perposal as that to me? What do I give a damn what kinda recommends I could git on little knothead like you by makin' a week's ride, when ever' day I ort to be on trail? What kinda numbskull air yuh anyhow, yuh take me fur sich a brainless fool? I've a good notion to wring yore blasted neck."

Nobody had ever talked to Lightning that way before. Another man would have known what to make of it. But he didn't. "Why, no," he said, "I wasn't a-meanin' that yuh should go an' see Bill, lessen yuh wanted to. Dunno's I meant much o' anything."

"Yuh take it all back then?" said Briggs threateningly.

"Course," said Lightning earnestly. "All I come here for was jist a job."

Then Briggs swelled up like a balloon and demanded, "What do they call yuh?"

"My right name is Cecil Peters, but they call me Lightning."

"All right, Mr. Lightning. I'm kinda partickler 'bout who I take along. Man's gotta have guts to stay in my outfit. Ordinar' I don't take no trash. But I'm jist a-needin' one more man to git started. So yo're hired ontil I git sick o' yuh an' git another man to take yore place."

"Thanky," said Lightning eagerly. "I was shore honin' to go up trail."

Then unsaddling the U Bar horse and

turning it loose to find its way back home, he became a 7A.

IT WAS a fine bunch of hands Lightning joined—if a man didn't care what he said.

There was Hank Lane, lean, long, hungry, who could have looked through a keyhole with both of his greenish eyes at once, though his crooked nose was pressed against the door. He had been with Briggs a good many seasons, because, being a natural born skunk and talebearer, he always kept Briggs posted as to any dissatisfaction among the rest of the hands. Then there were three fellows, Martin and Jackson and Graves, any one of whom would have felt honored to take Hank's place, but who were all too cowardly to have thought of usurping it. Finally, there was a gay little blue-eyed kid named Miller, from down on the coast. He had ridden only one season, and that had been on a small ranch. Adventure was all he had on his mind. Wages were no object to him, for he had folks who could send him money if he needed it. He could quit any time he wanted to. There was still another fellow; but as he had already seen all he wanted of Briggs and was going to sneak away that night, he didn't count.

Half an hour after Lightning piled his bed into the 7A wagon, the outfit got under way. He had barely time to catch a 7A horse and saddle it, and was not even given time to snatch a mouthful of dinner.

Miller, the blue eyed kid, was a whole-souled little chap. He thought it a terrible thing that Lightning should have to go until night without chuck, so he went to Briggs with that.

Of course Lightning, who was used to ranch riding, was also used to going without noon chuck whenever necessary. He didn't mind it at all, and paid no attention to the kid's sympathy for him. Neither did he think anything about it when the kid went back to talk to Briggs.

What happened between Briggs and the kid nobody will ever know. But back along the drag of the herd, where the kid and Briggs met, there were a couple of shots. Lightning didn't miss the kid until night. Then, when he asked Hank Lane where Miller was, Hank told him that the kid had got fresh with Briggs, had tried to draw a gun on him, and that Briggs had shot him twice. Once through the heart and once through the head.

"Well, that's too bad now," said Lightning. "I never thought nothin' like that o' that boy. He seemed sich a innocent, lovin' little feller, like."

Hank immediately reported that to Briggs, then came back to Lightning with advice that Briggs wanted to see him.

Briggs was seated on the tongue of the chuck wagon. He was cutting a notch with a three cornered file in his tally-stick.

There were already seven other notches on it. He looked up at Lightning in a kind of eager way, then licked his coarse lips and said, "I onderstand as how yuh lettin' on that I had no right to kill that murderous little scoundrel what tried to kill me, 'cause he said yuh hadn't had yore dinner."

Then laying aside his file, he got his sixshooter by the handle and waited, an evil grin on his face.

Lightning didn't see anything out of the way, either in the implied demand or the action which followed it. "Why, no," he said wonderingly, "I didn't know nothin' 'bout that killin' until Hank tole me few minutes ago. I 'lowed the little feller was all right. Seemed to me he was so innocent an' lovin'-like, I was plum shocked when Hank told me the feller tried to git yuh. 'Course a young boy that-away," he concluded reflectively, "yuh cain't allus tell what they will do."

"Then I reckon yo're willin' to swear, soon as we git up to the nex' town where we gotta turn his body over fur

an inquest, that I had puffick reason an' right for a-shootin' 'im?"

"Why, no, feller, 'course not," Lightning laughed. "I couldn't swear to nothin' o' my own knowin', 'cause I don't know nothin'."

"All right, then, Mr. Lightning," said Briggs, picking up his file again, "I'm short-handed enough as it is. So yuh kin go an' yuh won't be swore."

THE NEXT morning it was found that the other fellow who had planned to duck that night, had ducked. So the outfit, eight men short-handed to begin with, was short-handed ten.

But Briggs always went short-handed. The fewer men he had, the less the outlay for wages and chuck. The less outlay for wages and chuck, the greater the profit he could show to old man Anderson who owned the 7A. The more profit he could show to old man Anderson, the more old man Anderson would blow on him when he got back home. He had already killed a man, which not only pleased his vanity, but satisfied him that he would be able to do with the rest of his men whatever he pleased. So, though he was but half a day from home, he never thought of turning back.

At sunrise, with the dead boy piled on top of the bedrolls, the chuck wagon rattled away northward on the Tom Green Plains; while Briggs and Hank Lane and Hank's three understudies and Lightning fogged the three thousand cattle off the bed ground in pursuit of the flying wagon.

By the middle of the afternoon, fifteen miles north, two days' drive for a regular outfit just starting, the 7A dropped in for half an hour at a little town along the way—all but Lightning, that is. He kept the herd moving. The others went into the little town, stayed there half an hour, then came on, leaving the body of the blue eyed kid and the sworn statements of Briggs. Hank and the others had sworn that the boy had been killed by Briggs in self defense.

The bed ground for that night was seven miles further on. The 7A had made three days' drive in one, in spite of the stop to clear Briggs of what was in all probability a cold blooded murder.

The next day they reeled off another twenty odd miles.

And that sort of thing kept up day after day. Briggs, who could have picked up plenty of hands along the way where he wasn't known, didn't pick up any.

As long as the weather was good, he could shift right along with the men he had. With another man, generally Hank, he rode the point, well out of the dust, and kept the leaders moving at a trot; two other fellows flogged up the flanks. And back of the dust, Lightning and the other man fought the drag to keep up.

Lightning, who was always a somnolent boy in good weather—for all that he rode at a trot all day, popped his rope till his arm felt it would fall off, yelled from morning till night like a mad man and ate dust until he thought he would choke—yet for all of these things he didn't wake up to what he was into. He had never been up trail before. This wasn't quite the soft thing he had imagined. But the weather was good, so he was just his usual good weather self, which is to say, about like a piece of machinery. The machine went along, so he went along with it, a fairly satisfied and satisfactory part of it.

Briggs was well satisfied with him, drove him like a slave, talked to him as though he were a dog, and was entirely happy in the luck that brought such an apparent cringer to him.

THAT WAS the situation when, after some twenty odd days, the outfit came rolling up across the high, bald, level prairie to the Cimarron.

The Cimarron, like most plains riv-

ers, is generally a joke. Usually there is enough water in it to suggest a watercourse to a man of powerful imagination. Also at this particular place where the 7A had to cross, its sandy channel lay at the bottom of a deep and narrow valley which would help to suggest a fine bold stream.

But on this afternoon when the 7A came beating up to the brink of the long and precipitous descent into the narrow valley, it took a man of real imagination to reconcile himself to the reality of that river. Overhead the sky was a cloudless, brilliant blue and had been so for days. The grass everywhere for miles back, and right up to the edge of the going down place, was beginning to dry up. But down in the bottom of that narrow valley, the Cimarron was fairly lashing in its wide bed, as wild a flood as men often see. The roar from it was like that of a great hail storm.

Briggs stopped his outfit and went into camp there on the rim.

That was sensible. When the Cimarron really roared at that crossing, it wasn't good business to take a herd down into the narrow valley until the flood had gone by. In big rises it had been known to sweep from bluff to bluff.

Briggs and his worshippers were of course shocked at having to halt—Briggs because there was no saying how long the delay would last, and his worshippers because there was no saying what Briggs would do to them if the delay got to worrying him too heavily.

But Lightning was no worshipper of Briggs. If Lightning really worshipped anything, and he probably did, he worshipped the wild powers of the elements. At any rate, when he came riding up to the brink and looked over at the mad race of red waters far below, his blue eyes brightened strangely. Then, as he listened to the thunderous bellowing, a vague smile lighted his usually dull face and he said ecstatically, "She's glorious, hain't she? We shore had luck to come upon her this-away. Now if we could only git a good hell-roaring stawm."

Briggs and the others were all sitting their horses close by, so close that they all heard Lightning. "What's that?" Briggs demanded savagely. "You a-wishin' for a storm?"

"You betcha," said Lightning enthusiastically, "stawms is great doin's for a feller what's made right. That's why they allus called me Lightning. I'm fawty hoss power when it stawms."

Briggs fairly snorted, then swore like a trooper.

Lightning paid no attention to him. When Lightning began to wake up, and he was awakening now, he never paid much attention to anybody or to anything they said. He listened to the river; then he began to hum some wild old tune, and humming the tune, he rode back from the bank to look about the cattle.

That was always the way with him, when Lightning hummed or sang, he was keen for work.

There was plenty just then for him to do. The cattle, with nobody watching them for the moment, had begun to scatter each way along the brink and back into the plains, every steer willing to go anywhere on his own hook.

Briggs swore that he ought to kill Lightning, and his satellites echoed him; but when they saw what Lightning was doing they changed their minds about him for the time being.

Lightning went on humming his tune as he gathered the cattle.

That was about the middle of the afternoon. Long before dark the storm, which farther west had probably caused the flood, began to show signs of coming. The sky over that way grew hazy, then began to darken.

Lightning looked at the black sky and began to sing. By this time he had gotten the trail-worn cattle together again and in pretty fair shape for night herd.

The prospect for night herders, how-

ever, wasn't very happy. There was little danger of the worn-out cattle stampeding. But there was a storm coming. Cold rain in the dark meant no fun for Briggs and Hank and his bunch. But Lightning didn't mind that at all.

WHEN Lightning went in for night-chuck and found everybody sitting with slickers on and damning the outlook, he said—just as he had always done on the U Bar in bad weather, "You-all don't want to go out this evenin' if yuh don't hafto. The cattle, they won't run, bein' tired this-away. When there comes a good hellroarin' stawm I shore won't come in jist to go to bed. You betcha I like to ride her when she stawms. You-all stay in if yuh want to. Kinda whoops me up glorious to ride night herd alone when she stawms like hell was a-comin' loose. You betcha," and his big eyes filled with their wild brightness, "I be proud to ride this herd alone."

They all laughed at him, and were of course glad to let him go.

That night the whole bunch bunked in the wagon. They didn't sleep much. When the roar of thunder and the roar of rain on the wagon sheet didn't keep them awake, the songs that Lightning sang out in the blackness filled their ears the way all strange things do at night.

When morning came, a different set of men might have been grateful to him for having relieved them of night herd. But Briggs and his worshippers were not gratefully inclined toward anybody for anything.

The first thing Briggs said when Lightning came riding up to the wagon for breakfast was, "Shet off that damn' singin' or I'll come out there an' wring yore fool neck."

The cook had chuck ready and Lightning, who was hungry, started right in on his breakfast. Briggs and the other hands were still up in the wagon bed. The weather was still wild, rain was either falling steadily or was being driven.

Lightning got away with two or three tin plates full of stew, a quart or more of hot coffee, then he was ready to go right out again if need be.

He rolled himself a cigaret, took a few puffs and threw it away. Then climbing up on the doubletree of the wagon, he looked in under the sheet. Seeing everybody still in bed, he laughed uproariously at the sight, and said, "Well, you fellers are the damndest fellers I ever see. Hain't they nothin' a-tall to yuh. By gosh, you-all are worse'n the U Bars. Leastways, they would git up an' git their pants on in time for breakfus'."

Nobody on his payroll had ever ventured to talk in any such fashion to Briggs. Briggs' powerful lower jaw, which was undershot like that of a bulldog, fairly snapped. He reached for his gun. Then his face filled with brutal cunning. He winked at Hank and the others, and in a voice that might have warned anybody he said, "Mr. Lightning, gitta hell outa here an' take keer o' this day herd in time, or yo're goin' to find out somethin' what might not do yuh no good."

Lightning had only been joking. When the forty horsepower was working in him, his jokes were apt to be careless. He had expected to go back on day herd anyhow. With a roar of laughter he dropped off the doubletree, then above the roar of the rain on the drum-tight wagon sheet, he lifted his voice in song—

There was five fellers down Pecos way,
So all-fired wuthless they jist et hay.
Come a little stawm they all went to bed,
Come a little skeer they covered up their head.
Hooray, boys. Ever'body sing,
They's a good time a comin' by an' by.

That was far too much for the highly sensitive Briggs. Getting out of his

blankets he rushed to the front of the wagon and yelled, "Wait there a minute, Mr. Lightning. I got somethin' more to say to yuh."

Lightning heard him, stopped just beyond the end of the wagon tongue on his way to his horse, stopped and waited, hooking and unhooking one of his spur shanks in the neck yoke ring to kill time.

IN THE course of five minutes, having dressed and put on his slicker, Briggs came down over the front of the wagon box. After him came his four fine followers, all dressed and in their slickers. They didn't know what Briggs was going to do. But whatever it was, they wanted to see it. Their faces were covered with half fearful yet half delightful grins. Briggs' face was very red.

He came walking through the mud toward Lightning with disarming deliberation, and he said in a voice that betokened no unusual purpose, "Yuh think them cattle are goin' to be all right, do yuh?" But as soon as he came within lunging distance of Lightning who was still playing with the neck yoke ring and looking down at the yoke, Briggs lunged and caught Lightning by the arms.

"Now," he bellowed, "what d'yuh mean a-talkin' to me the way you did? An' what d'yuh mean a-singin' that insultin' song yuh did jist now? Don't you know who I am?"

Lightning was a short, skinny fellow. He didn't weigh more than half as much as Briggs. But when Lightning was awake, and he was awake now, ten thousand Briggs, though they had been armed with thunderbolts, could not have daunted him. He laughed coolly up into Briggs' murderous face and said, "Feller, it's about time yuh was inquirin' who yo're foolin' with. I'm Lightning, an' I'm fawty hoss power when it stawms. It's stawmin' now, feller." And his blue eyes began to widen dangerously, while his voice rang with a wild note that made everybody's heartstrings jerk. "I say hit's a-stawmin' now. Yuh better let go o' me. I never harmed no man livin', but I know I'm dangerous when it stawms."

"How dangerous?" Briggs roared with laughter.

Then he let go the little fellow's arm with his right hand and struck him with all his might between the eyes.

Lightning went down and went backward as though a battering ram had hit him. Briggs hung onto the sleeve of Lightning's slicker with his left hand, so that when the puncher fell, the sleeve tore away from the shoulder all around.

Briggs stepped back, folded his arms, and then said a little magnificently, "I reckon I ort not to have hit him. But no man kin talk to me the way he talked an' git away with it. When he comes to, he's goin' to 'pologize for what he said, or else I'm goin' to finish him."

He had finished several men. The curs behind him were delighted. They had seen him finish several poor devils as inoffensive as little Lightning, They didn't mind seeing Lightning finished.

To make sure that nothing happened, Hank Lane skipped over to the unconscious man, fished under his slicker, got the other's sixshooter, and rushing back, handed it over to Briggs.

Briggs put the gun in his waistband, then walked back to the doubletree. There he sat down watchfully, like a brave, cool man dangerously threatened.

Hank and the others ranged themselves along the wagon tongue to watch.

Pretty soon the cold rain beating in Lightning's face brought him to his senses. Lifting himself on his elbow, he tried to rub the swelling out of his eyes, for the lids were swelling shut. For a second, he didn't realize what was the matter. Then, as his reviving memory made it clear to him what ailed his eyes and he came further out of his daze, the cold rain on his arm where the slicker had been torn away claimed his

attention. He clapped his left hand on the great rent in the sleeve, and his mouth flew open in amazement.

That was a show, a regular circus for Hank and the other three along with Briggs. They all began to laugh uproariously. But they didn't laugh long, for it wasn't long until Lightning heard them.

THE INSTANT Lightning heard, he got slowly to his feet. Overhead, deep thunder was growling, and his voice curiously blended with that thunder as he said, "You-all are jist like damn' cattle. I reckon when cattle, which hain't nothin' but bone an' beef, runs over a man an' knocks him down when he ain't lookin', they would laugh too, only Gawd Almighty has made them more respectable."

"What's that?" demanded Briggs, jumping forward from the doubletree, and thrusting out his undershot jaw.

Then he made a pass for the gun under his slicker. "What yuh sayin' to me?"

He stopped short and stared in amazement.

Lightning, reaching for his gun and not finding it, was coming straight on barehanded and saying in that same wild voice, "Hombre, I tell yuh you'd better move. I'm Lightning, and I'm comin' to kill yuh shore as hell."

Briggs didn't move except to tear away at the tail of his slicker. The four cowardly scamps also began to reach for their guns.

Lightning didn't speak again. Out of the black rings which were now his eye sockets those blue eyes of his blazed as they always blazed when the lightning played and the thunder broke. And suddenly, in the way that lightning flashes, he stooped down, caught the heavy ironbound neck yoke from the ground, and swinging it as he might have swung a straw, charged the five.

Then one of those storm blasts which Lightning loved swept down. Night seemed to fall again, night shot with jagged lightnings, night blown to bits by detonating thunders that seemed to spurn the very earth, to sink it and to destroy all things. With it came roar of rain and the wilder roar of hail. And through that latter, roaring like the cries of those wild geese which are sometimes heard when they wing their way above the storm or through them, came the fierce cries of Lightning. There were other sounds too. The dull crash of gunfire was there; but—pitched lower—it was deadened in the fury of the storm, while wild cries seemed to blend and magnify.

Like some demon, some god of the storm itself, Lightning rushed through the blasts of rain swinging his heavy weapon. There was no standing up against him. Gunfire was a futile and impotent thing against this spirit of the storm whose weapon swung to the clink and clank of its iron rings. Life was reaching its highest pitch in Lightning while he dealt death to those who had driven him.

WHEN the gust had passed, the affray was over.

Hank Lane, with his right arm broken and his left side caved in, cringed under the wagon, a man about to die. The three men who aped his ways were little better off; they lay on their sides or on their backs moaning, broken like soldiers where a shell has burst. Sprawled on his back, just where he had been standing when Lightning had gone for him, lay Briggs with drawn guns.

Lightning stood over him still clutch-

ing the four foot iron-bound, iron-ringed yoke. But Lightning didn't need to stand over him nor to strike again.

Briggs had killed his last trailhand. Briggs, who had made it his dear ambition to run that outfit like a slave driver, then kill the simple, inoffensive kids who mistook him for a man, lay there with his skull crushed like the shell of a broken egg.

Lightning looked down at him, then looked down at the drawn gun.

He had felt the breath of that gun and of other guns when he had raged against them in the blinding storm, but no bullet had touched him.

As he looked at the gun, he muttered in that voice which blended with the now receding thunder, "I knowed yore guns could never tech me. When stawms break, then hit comes to me I got the power o' stawms."

Cowboy in the Arctic

(*continued from page 37*)

and put on the choke and cranked. He cranked like mad but the engine never caught. Hurriedly he looked at the gas indicator, cupping his match. A bullet hit the vessel overhead. Then they were out of danger down in a trough. Bill cranked again after kicking off the choke.

The motor caught, sputtered, almost died, then strengthened and boomed out, ready to go.

Old Matt said, "Help me, son?"

Bill got the old man in the boat. Another bullet hit, this time ricocheting off steel, ahead of them.

"Cut us loose, Matt."

Old Matt cut the rope aft and Bill cut it free. The motor kicked in, the governor caught, and the prop ripped water. Matt steered it out around the ship. From the other vessel came the spit of gunfire but there wasn't a chance in a million of connecting.

"Wonder why they never used our launch?" old Matt asked.

"This," Bill said, and pointed down.

Water was seeping into the bottom of the boat. Coming in rather fast, too. Old Matt swore.

"They never fixed it good in dry dock a month ago. Damn that Eskimo son of a wolf!"

"Swing out like we aimed to head for open water," Bill said. "This launch is faster than their boat. They'll figure we'll sink out beyond the reef. But we'll sneak back, behind the reef. Say, how much fuse did you put on thet powder?"

The old man cackled.

"How much, Matt?"

"All we had, Bill. I set it under the captain's bunk. I do hope they climb into thet ship."

"They're goin' up the side now. They must aim to chase us with thet boat. Bet it can cut water, too."

"So they aim, Bill."

The vessel was moving ahead, turning sharply. It was a whimdinger for speed, Bill saw.

Old Matt frowned. "Thet black powder—it oughta be goin' off—about now—" He never finished.

The vessel seemed to suddenly stop. It ran into an invisible barrier. Then it went down in the middle, broke in two, and the waves lapped over it. The sea water hurriedly extinguished the blaze that had roared out of the ship's center.

Bill said, "God, that happened fast. One minute it was there, the next it was gone— Hey, look at the timbers fly!"

"Them three fur poachers are up there flying too," Matt Smith said. "But they ain't in one hunk—their arms is goin' this direction an' their legs the other. Hey, we better swing back to their camp and patch this skiff, son."

"*Grandson,*" Bill Jones corrected.

★

It was Jim Blair who had saved Bart Lyon from a rustler's death, set him on the straight and narrow. And Bart had made good, won his gold star in the Cowman's Association. But now that Jim was dead, Lyon didn't care any more—either for honor or the badge he wore...

RENEGADE

by JOHN MOORE

AT FULL gallop Bart Lyon spurred across the brushy crest, his little gray eyes wildly alert.

Down ahead a hundred yards, the chaparral opened, enclosing a small round glade. In the middle of the glade stood two horses. One, a fine bay, was being held by a young woman. She sat the other horse and didn't look up; but she seemed to Bart somehow familiar.

Bart, a field man for the Texas Cowman's Association—gold star man too—was officially on a manhunt. He had expected someone here with a change of horses for him. He had fifty miles to ride through terrible country, and five hours to do it in—had to make it clean down to the Rio Grande somewhere by noon. He had expected to find a change of horses right here and, in addition to change of horses, someone to guide him; for he didn't know the country very well.

The manhunt he was on, as well as the change horses, the guide, and so on—all arranged in advance—was, of course, just raw fake.

Case, the biggest outfit owner and main prop of the Association in that part of Texas, was also the biggest cowthief in Texas. Bart was to make his ride, pretended capture of two or three cheapskates already arranged for, and then go back to Headquarters in Fort Worth and swear that he had caught or killed the ringleaders of the big gang, so that Case's cleaned out neighbors would stock up again and give Case more cattle to steal. Bart was to get ten thousand cash for what he was doing.

In spite of the gold star on his breast, mark of highest merit for any field man in the Association, Bart looked to be the very fellow for the job. Squat, powerfully built, boldly brutal-faced, he looked like the most abandoned young desperado imaginable.

He didn't trust Case; he figured that Case would try to work him for something more than had been speci-

fied. He had been looking for most anything when he had ridden over the ridge just now.

Now, with unerring instinct, he knew that this young woman—who, he was pretty sure, would be Case's daughter Jude—had been sent out here instead of the promised guide, to talk him into something Case himself had lacked the nerve to ask for.

He was pretty sure the young woman would be Jude. Jude was slightly known to him. A couple of years ago, when his gold star had been new and meant a little—though not much—to him, he had been sent down from Headquarters, a stranger. Before that, Case always had pulled wool over the eyes of Headquarters' men, whom he called down every so often. But he hadn't fooled Bart. Lyon had begun life a cowthief. He had seen right through Case. Case, scared out of his boots, had offered Bart ten thousand a year then to protect him at Headquarters. Bart not wanting that at all, Case had then tried to wind him up by having Jude pretend to fall in love with him. So, though he hadn't paid much attention to Jude, Bart remembered her.

Sure enough, when he came closer he recognized her. Also, as he had expected, she began on him with the old buncombe. He pretended to fall for that, to find out what she was up to.

Then it came out—partially. Fixing her rather fine, but hard black eyes on him in what seemed to be an appeal, she said, "Whatever dad asks you to do down there on the Rio today you'll do it, won't you—for me?"

"Shore, Miss Jude. What's he goin' to want me to do?"

"He's going to ask you to throw a certain Association man."

Bart's grinning face turned white as a sheet. A gasp came from him, like that from a man with a foot of steel rammed into him from behind. Then he threw back his head and laughed in wildest derision.

THERE had never been but one man in the world he wouldn't have thrown; that man also had been an Association man. Nevertheless, although he hadn't meant to do it, Bart had thrown that man and now held himself wholly responsible for his death. But that was over; that couldn't be mended.

"Haw!" he roared. "Throw an Association man! Hellsfire! If the devil hisse'f was on the 'Sociation an' the price was right, I'd burn him at the stake! Me? Damn me, I'll do anything for money. Hell's fire woman, yo're wastin' yore time a-astin' anything the old man wants like that. I'll throw anyone."

Jude, thin lipped, drew back. Crouched in her saddle she looked at him out of fear-filled eyes—then she decided that his promise was full enough.

With a frightened little laugh, she put a small silver whistle to her lips and blew a long, strong blast. From a thick clump of tall pin-oak a hundred yards off on the right, a tall man on a big sorrel came at a gallop, crashing through the low chaparral.

"It's Dalton," said Jude; "he'll show you the way." Then, without so much as a nod, she rode swiftly out of the glade.

Bart was glad to get rid of her. She had made him think of Jim Blair. Cursing her for that, he jumped down to change his saddle to the bay horse she had brought. He was ready to ride when Dalton reined down beside him.

Dalton, tightmouthed and shifty-eyed, forced his gaze into a long, appraising stare, then demanded, "Ye had fair onderstandin' 'ith Jude what the ole man wants, did ye?"

Bart turned on him savagely. "Damn ye!" he growled. "Yo're a man. Ye try to wind around an' throw that up to me agin, I'll kill ye cold."

Dalton, right bower for Case, knew, of course, just what Jude was supposed to have asked. He had known,

too, because all Texas had twice rung with Bart's devotion to Jim Blair that there might be an explosion when Jude disclosed the truth that Jim was living and that Case wanted Bart to get Jim where Jim might be killed safely. That was why Dalton had hidden in the pin-oaks, and had kept a rifle trained on Bart until Jude blew the whistle.

Assuming, from Bart's murderous humor, that Jude had wrung from him a promise to do what her father wanted, and not daring to direct that humor toward himself, Dalton waved his arm to indicate their course across the rolling chaparral, then spurred out of the glade.

Bart galloped after him. In most places the way was along paths through low brush, wide enough only for one horse. For fifteen or twenty minutes, during which Dalton led the way, Bart fought the thought that Jude had inspired.

For Jim Blair was the man who had given Bart all the white things Bart had ever cared for.

BART, WHO never knew who his father was, had at six been taken on as handy boy by Gum Deer, the Chickisha thief. At nineteen, boldest of all Nation thieves, Bart had led a wild little band, far up into the Pan. The ranchers, however, had attacked before he had stolen a thing, and Bart and his five wild ones were surrounded by fifty furious cowmen and ordered to surrender.

Bart, determined not to be taken alive, had drawn his gun. He had felt the mainspring break as he thumbed the hammer and, resolving to die, he had tried to kill his nearest assailant by hurling the useless pistol. The only thing he did was to kill that rider's mount by crushing the horse's skull. Then all his fellows had been shot down. Determined to make an example of him for all time to come, the cowmen had roped Bart, and started to drag him to death behind saddle horses.

But Jim Blair, only gold star man of the Association, at risk of his job and also at risk of his life, had saved Bart from that mob.

Then Bart, who had never believed that any man would do such a thing for another, had been glad to have Jim take him.

Nobody that mattered had been hurt. Bart was only a kid. All he got was a year in the pen. When he had served his time, Jim, who said that he had never had fair chance, got him a job with the Association. Because of Jim's sponsoring, the Association had welcomed Bart.

Also, if it hadn't been for Jim, even with that good job offered, Bart would far rather have gone straight back to his old tricks. Away down in his boots he knew that everybody, except Jim Blair, was just like himself—mean, ornery, hateful as hell. Just put the iron to them right and all of them but Jim would squirm and do anything. As it was, he had taken the job eagerly because he didn't want to lose Jim.

For a year after that Bart had been sure it wasn't all bunk about there being a Heaven. He had received sure enough glimpses of it through Jim Blair.

That had been a great time for Bart. He and Jim had never been out of sight of each other. They had hunted thieves everywhere around the Pan, over in New Mexico, up in Colorado, in Kansas, and off in the Nation—Lyon's old stamping grounds.

Then one day they had tangled with six tough hombres, and from that day things had gone dead wrong for Bart.

That day he and Jim had thought they were after just one fellow hidden in some brush, a little patch through which the trail went. Bart, for fear Jim might get killed, had gone on fifty yards in the lead. Getting about half way through the patch, Bart had dismounted to go in and chase the fellow out. Instead of waiting, the scoundrel Bart was looking for had come right

out with his hands up. Never thinking of anybody else, Bart had gone on out into the open with his prisoner, for it was a hot day and he hadn't wanted to wait there for Jim where it was so close and sultry. But when Jim come along through the thicket, the five other men—who were anxious to get him, but didn't care a whoop about Bart—had opened up on him. Only one of them had hit him. But that fellow had hit him in the head. Jim, though only creased—but badly creased—had fallen as if wounded mortally. Then the idiot beside Bart and the other five, who had known Bart for years, laughed at him and told him to come back with them.

Bart turned on them, fought them, and had never stopped until he had killed them all.

Right after that, while Jim was still in the hospital wavering between life and death, the Association, full of their own hot air about Bart being able to go it alone anywhere, had pinned the gold star on him, and sent him off down here by himself on that trip of two years ago, to Case.

Bart had turned Case down that time because of Jim. He wanted nothing to do with that kind of business while Jim was alive. Being afraid, though, that Jim might die, and seeing no reason for turning down such a fine offer in such an emergency, Bart had never told a thing about Case and his game at headquarters.

Jim had been about a month coming out of it, and then had gotten well almost in a day.

BY THAT time, Bart Lyon had told so many lies about this graft down here that he hadn't been able to think of coming right out and telling Jim the truth. He had been sure that something would happen, so that he would never have to admit that he wasn't square, as Jim always insisted he was or going to be.

Things had rocked along pretty well for a few months. Then, one day, just when he was sure that he would never hear of Case again in any way that amounted to anything, he had received a long letter from Case renewing the first offer and asking him to contrive, on a certain date, to be the old field man available at Headquarters.

Having burnt the letter, Bart had gone to Jim, and learning that Jim half expected to be up in Kansas on the date Case had specified in the letter, Bart had told him that whatever happened to be, he must never, under any consideration, permit himself to be sent down as field man for Case.

Jim, who always took everything easy, hadn't asked why and of course Bart hadn't told him. They had just talked about Case, Bart telling Jim some pretty tall ones, so as to get Jim off on them. Then, certain he had taken care of Jim all right, Bart had gotten himself detailed for work away up in the Picketwire country where, no matter how long Case waited for him to get back to Headquarters, or how hard Case tried to make him come, the old skunk would just have to whistle.

He had been up there on one of the ranches about a month, pretending to be a rambling cowhand, doing a little spying for the Association too, as a matter of course, but in reality, just laughing in his sleeve for the easy way he had dodged Case.

Then one day, when he knew that Case had pulled his stunt or else had postponed it, Bart had gotten leave of the boss to go into town. In town he had bought some newspapers.

The first headline that caught his eye had been one on a story telling that Jim Blair, Ike Barge, and Tod Riley had all been sent down on the Case assignment and that all three had been killed, along with two of Case's men.

There had been a great gunfight at a ford in the Rio Grande, the story said, and every dead man had been washed away. But Bart didn't believe much of it because Case was quoted all along as

the fellow who had told it to the papers.

Just the same, Bart had known that Jim and the other boys must have gone, and that knowledge made him so sick that he had a terrible time riding back to that ranch. There, he hadn't been able to eat a bite or shut an eye for three days. Then, pretending to go to the doctor, he had ridden in again for more papers.

The story that time was the one he had been afraid of.

The bodies of Ike and Tod, riddled with bullets, had been found where they had floated up on a sand bar in the Rio, forty miles below the scene of the fight. Too, the carcasses of their horses and that of Jim's horse had been found in the river. Jim's body had not been found. It was believed to have become silt-laden as bodies often are in the Rio and of course lost forever.

For several days then, Bart was a little insane. But he emerged from it the same hard man he had been before he met Jim. He left the ranch in the Picketwire.

It hadn't gone against the grain with him at all to hook up with Case, although he knew very well that Case's gang had killed Jim. In fact, he hadn't blamed Case for the killing of Jim. For Bart, coldly logical, knew that had he been in Case's boots, he would have done exactly what Case had done. He mourned his friend, but with Jim gone, enmity as well as friendship ceased to exist. Men, in fact, and men's lives, ceased to mean anything. Bart began to live by a system that recognized no human values.

THIS RAN through Bart's mind, as, under Dalton's wild lead, he raced along over rolling brush-grown ridges, across mesquite flats, and over naked hills as steep as house roofs, where nothing but cactus grew. Every five miles they changed horses for animals Dalton had hitched along the route.

Even when they made those changes of horse, Bart Lyon never spoke to Dalton or even looked at him. Dalton, fearful, was also silent and kept his eyes to the front.

Thus, riding like speechless fiends, they thundered just a little before noon, across the top of the last ridge.

Before them, and below, covered with dense mesquite thickets, lay the valley of the Rio, at that point two miles wide. Yellow as ochre, plainly at half flood, the Rio, under high cut banks, bordered the far edge of the thickets. Thirty or forty mud huts clustered just back of those cutbanks.

Bart didn't know the name of that little Mexican town. He asked, "What do they call it?"

"Conita," Dalton called without looking back.

Twenty minutes later, having slithered down off the ridge and dashed through dense thickets, the two men drew out into fairly open timber, close enough to the river to hear it hum and sing.

Case and twenty-five of the hard gunmen whom he employed as cowhands, waited there in that open timber for Bart and his guide.

A lean, gigantic, wary sort of man of sixty, with eyes black and fathomless as wells, Case rode to meet Bart, greeted him gruffly, and then, without offering his hand, or dismounting he said, "You had your little talk with Jude?"

"Yup." Then, to pay Case a little for the fire which that business had kindled in him, Bart laughed contemptuously and said, "Must be gittin' weak in yore upper works from old age, Case, to think ye had to go beatin' 'round the bush for a thing like that with a rattlesnake like me!"

Case reddened angrily. He didn't like to have his years thrown at him. Neither did he like to be taunted about anything because of the fix he was in. With visible effort, he kept his tongue.

Bart went on provokingly, "Reckon ye knowed, didn't ye, that this'll cost a

helluva lot more than the ten thousand we talked of 'fore this come up?"

Case had expected that. He knew Bart well enough to know that he would have to pay, and pay through the nose. Case was ready to pay that way too. Without hesitation, but very grimly, he said, "Quick as ye deliver the goods, I'll pay ye fifty thousand cash. I've got it right here in the timber. It'll be yours inside of an hour, quick as ye can cross the river and get back here with him into the timber out of sight of the other bank."

Bart recalled, now, that all this new business had to do with an Association man. However, he wasn't interested in finding out which one of the forty or fifty Association field men that one might be. All that interested him was to know why Case was willing to pay so much money. He laughed uproariously and then said, "That bird must have ye where the hair is short."

Case imagined he had nothing to conceal. With a mirthless chuckle he explained, "Yeah, he sure has. Been over there on the other side six months digging into my business. Got onto everything, I reckon, before I tumbled. Couple of months ago though, I got onto him and tried to have him croaked, but he killed the boys I sent after him. Then I got the fool *jefe* over there at Conita to arrest him and hold him *incommunicado*.. I didn't dare to stir things up too much over there on the other side. Didn't think I'd need to. Thought the *jefe* would just hold him over there in that cistern with a flat rock over it, till he rotted. But the *incommunicado* leaked. Day before yesterday, I got word that twenty State Rangers were to pile off the railroad up there on the ten o'clock train this forenoon to come straight down here, across the Conita and give him safe conduct back here where he can hang me higher than Haaman. I hadn't more'n got that word from a friend of mine down at Austin, than the fool *jefe* sent me a message, sayin' that he has orders from Mexico City to turn his prisoner loose at noon. You bet he's got me where the hair's short. Without I can twile him over here ahead of those Rangers, so that I can plant him for keeps, I'm through for good and all."

The old man trembled from head to foot and his voice broke as he said, "I'm through for good and all."

Bart slapped his thigh and rolled in his saddle with delight. The situation to him, was supremely amusing. He understood it thoroughly.

UNDER COVER of the big thickets which lined the Texas side of the Rio for fifty miles, Case quietly gathered his neighbor's cattle, then shoved them across the river on dark nights. Through dummy ranchers on the other side, he would blot all brands and put on new ones. Then months later, far up the river or far down, the dummies would declare those same cattle for export into Texas. Case would pretend to buy them. With bills of sale apparently guaranteed by the U. S. Customs, he would then ship the cattle, three or four train-loads a year, to the big markets and pocket as profit everything but the customs fees and whatever he had to pay his henchmen. Any Association man working carefully on the other side would, of course, get onto all that far more easily than he possibly could in Texas. Case couldn't head him off either. If Case went down to the big politicians at the capital in order to have them make the fool *jefe* hang that fellow over in Conita, Case would have to give away his game down there and those big politicians would simply graft his fine business out of existence.

Bart Lyon hadn't enjoyed a bigger joke in months. He loved to see men squirm, particularly big men like old Case.

"Ho! Ho!" he roared. "An' the only way out is for me to toll this feller acrost to where ye kin Arkansaw him in the bresh an' dump him into the Rio 'fore the Rangers come? Case, yo're

one helluva smart man, you shore air. Sixty year ole an' wuth quatah million I reckon, to git ketched in a snap where dog meat like me is all on airth kin save ye. Say, ole fathead, whut'd ye do now, if I was to tell ye that I've changed my mind 'bout goin' over after him, an' tell ye to go to hell?"

Case had prepared for that ominous contingency. Over at Conita the *jefe* had a garrison of fifty soldiers. Case hadn't been able to bribe the *jefe*, who had sense enough to fear his superiors. But Case had been able to bribe the garrison. If worst came to worst, the soldiers over there would lock the *jefe* in his own jail and bring Jim Blair across, the minute Case hoisted a red flag above the thickets. But that kind of thing would bring down on him the great vultures from the Capital. That would save his life and perhaps his reputation; but it would cost a hundred thousand dollars before it was over, and in addition, would ruin his freedom of action on the other side for all time to come.

Brokenly, he explained all that—all that except in his references to Blair, he didn't happen to mention Jim's name. He had avoided it from the first, shrewdly fearing that mere mention of Jim's name might start a train of thought in Bart which would cause him to refuse to do what was wanted of him.

Bart laughed at his explanation, then cut him short. "Hell yes, I'll go fetch him," he said. "Me, with my gold star o' honor an' lofty repitation, I'll make him b'leeve the Rangers sent me, ruther'n them Mexes cross over. Hell, yes! On fifty thousant I kin drink myself mebbe to wher' I'll see the snakes. Town over there. Gimme some money now."

He was always broke since he had lost Jim, drinking up his salary fast as he drew it.

"Not a cent for you," said Case grimly. "Not until you deliver the goods. You go over there with money you'll get drunk and let my business wait."

"Gimme twenty dollars. Ye know I cain't git drunk on that."

Bart's capacity was enormous and Case knew it. He handed him ten dollars.

Bart stuffed the bill into his pocket then ordered, "Show me the ford."

Case turned to a gimlet-eyed slinking little man and said, "Go and show him the way, Huggins. Go on across with him, too. You're new with me. Nobody knows you over there. Stay right with him till he comes back. And if anything happens, he tries to back out or gets drunk and into trouble, you come right back to me."

"Yeah, Huggins," Bart laughed, "come right back to him if ye kin outrun bullets from my hoglaigs."

Huggins looked like he was already getting ready to run. But he contained himself sufficiently to wait for Bart to follow him.

FIFTY YARDS, and the thin timber ended on the edge of a dense narrow belt bordering the river bank. From that dense belt, Huggins, leading on a long-legged black, they rode out on a gravelly bar.

Then Huggins cautioned. "She's dangerous, awful dangerous for out 'bout a hundred and fifty yards. We dursent ride side an' side. Where a hoss wade is turrible narrer, lots o' places no room for two. We git out, though, hundred an' fifty yards we git on a big shaller bar. Hain't fetlock deep on the bar, an' from the bar on the rest the way, though she's purty deep in places, she hain't swift. So ye better stay behind ontil I hit the bar."

The river, nearly a quarter of a mile wide, fairly hummed.

Bart Lyon laughed at that, told Huggins to go ahead, and then, as soon as the fellow started his black into the plunging yellow current, spurred right alongside him.

"For Gawd's sake," the other

whined, "don't! *Don't!* We'll both git drowned if ye do."

"Easy death, they say. Ye think ye don't want it, spur yore hoss. They's booze over there. The thought of it makes me sociable."

Then, shouting a ribald song, he permitted Huggins to go ahead.

The horses had to fight for their footing in the powerful current at every step. Both animals were whistling for breath as though they had run a mile uphill, when Huggins and Bart rode up on the bar. The sand bar, about fifteen or twenty feet across the top, had but a few inches of water over it. From there on, though often belly deep, the going was safe and easy.

Presently, the two emerged on the Mexican side, climbed a cut leading up between high yellow banks and rode out into the hovel-surrounded square of bare earth, which was the Plaza of Conita.

It was just noon.

From one of the huts, a fat, bandy-legged little man in an official black coat, official flat hat, and with a sword at his side, was heading for the middle of the square. Out in the middle of the square was a big flat stone. A dozen men, in white cotton pants and tunics and with bare feet, but with rifles on their shoulders, followed the little man in the black coat.

It was just noon.

The little fat man with the bandy legs was the *jefe* of Conita. The men behind him were part of his garrison. The flat rock toward which he led them was the roof of the cistern which the *jefe* used for his *cuartel*. He was going out there with his men to liberate Jim Blair.

Familiar with border jails; apprised, too, of what was happening, Bart put his horse to a gallop, bore down on the procession and stopped it half way out to the flat stone.

There was a little bit of the man left in Bart. Thought had come to him that whomever this Association man might be, the man would undoubtedly be one of Jim's old friends. For that reason Bart wanted, if possible, to fuddle himself a little before he betrayed that man to his death.

Bowing low from his saddle to the *jefe* so as to display his gold star to best advantage, he greeted in good Spanish, "Excellency, a word with you. I am from Texas. Sent to look after this man you are setting free. Before we proceed to that I would like your acquaintance."

The *jefe,* secret admirer of the fierce *Americanos* from Texas and greatly afraid of them, was impressed.

With purpose, instead of wrath or suspicion in his bold face, Bart, in spite of his short stature, was a tremendous figure. His arched chest was like a barrel; his jaws were like iron; and his little gray eyes, deep under broad overhanging brows, were stop-signals for anybody.

THE FAT little *jefe* smiled with pleasure at what seemed to him a great honor. He swept off his hat, turned and dismissed his soldiers and then, with many apologies, led the way back to his official residence. A few minutes delay in execution of the important order from the Capital would make no difference, seeing that the delay need never be heard of down there. Moreover, knowing the condition the prisoner was in, he thought it would be well to be sure of amiable relations with this formidable young man who had come for him. As soon as he got to the door of his shack he began an artful palaver.

Bart Lyon didn't want to hear anything about the prisoner. He wanted a few drinks. He invited the *jefe* to lead the way to his favorite *cantina.*

Every place in the town that sold anything, sold spirits. Bart and the *jefe,* with the slinking Huggins at their heels, and with a long tail of inquisitive and equally thirsty soldiers bringing up the rear, began to take in the *cantinas.*

Bart, of course, paying for everything, which in the town of Conita was not only the privilege, but the duty, of the Texas guest.

Presently, Bart, thanks to the enterprise of the bartenders who charged him three prices for everything, had no cash left. The *jefe* was getting pretty mellow. Huggins, after the first drink, had been ditching his *aguardiente* and was merely alert. Bart hadn't begun to feel good even. He wasn't yet ready for the ordeal of the prisoner.

"See here," he said to the *jefe,* "I got all kinds of money over on the other side. Tell these fellows I'm all right and will pay them this evening."

The *jefe,* ony too delighted to prolong the drinking, did a wonderful job of it. He guaranteed Lyon's credit without limit.

Then Bart, with an idea forming in his brain for the disposal of the job he didn't quite like, began to invite the soldiers to drink.

Word of that invitation simply flew and inside of two minutes every soldier in town was on the square or rather was in some *cantina* pouring down *tequila* and *aguardiente.*

Inside of ten minutes everybody but Bart, Huggins, and the bartenders were drunk.

Then Bart, not at all drunk, but fuddled enough for such a brazen proposal, turned to the boozy little *jefe* and said, "Excellency, I do not want the man I have been sent after. He is guilty of great crimes. To take him back as has been arranged will only give me a great deal of trouble. He is only to be hanged anyhow. I prefer that you have your soldiers lead him out somewhere, where I don't have to look at him, and shoot him."

To everybody but Huggins that seemed all right—perfectly proper. To the *jefe* it seemed a fine relief from the embarrassment he had feared. He clapped his hands to summon the soldiers.

The drunken soldiers came on the run.

To Huggins, who knew what such a business would surely do to Case, it was preposterous. Unnoted, he sneaked through the crowd, gained his horse, and spurred like a madman across the open square for the cut down to the ford.

THE HOOFBEATS of the horse on the hard ground arrested, then drew everybody's attention. The instant Bart glimpsed him, there flashed into his mind the exact significance of what Huggins meant to do—warn Case and stop this business which would surely be heard of in the Capital.

"Halt!" Lyon yelled, "or I'll kill ye."

Like lightning he drew his guns, for Huggins, instead of stopping, only sent his horse the faster. Bart tried to fire.

Though the soldiers packed six deep around him were not tall, any of them were as high as Lyon. Flat on his feet he couldn't shoot; so he bounded high in the air and fired with both guns.

At one shot Huggins' hat flew off. The other shot missed. Bart sank from his jump. When he soared again, Huggins had vanished into the cut.

The *jefe* suddenly sobered. Realization had come to him that Huggins was crossing the river for help from that formidable Ranger force to stop this impromptu execution. That the Ranger force had arrived three hours ahead of time he had already taken for granted, because he thought Bart was their messenger. At heart, the polite little man was extremely cautious—terribly afraid of his superiors. He had been led into this wild foolishness through his gullibility, his politeness, and his fear of Bart Lyon. He was mortally afraid of the men on the other side of the river—mortally afraid, too, of his superiors. But the men on the other side of the river were not in sight and his superiors were still further away. Bart, whom he really feared more than all of them, stood before him. So he decided to be

diplomatic. "Senor," he pleaded, "I fear there is some mistake. Now that this occurs to me, I recall that the man whom you have asked me to execute had in his possession, when we arrested him, a gold star, such as you yourself wear with honor."

Bart started as if he was shot. He crushed the little man's shoulders in his tremendous hands, shook him off his feet and roared, "Ye lie! I'll kill ye for that lie."

"Senor, it is true as I have said. I have the star on my person for safe keeping. Here it is." And, wildly twisting his right arm, pinned as in a vise at the shoulder, he produced the star.

Bart Lyon's knees turned to water. He caught his own head in his hands. "A'mighty Gawd — A'mighty Gawd — A'mighty Gawd!" Then his knees gave way completely and he cried, *"Oh Jim!"*

The frightened *jefe* backed away. The drunken soldiers crowded closer, fascinated at the sight of such a man on his knees.

Bart paid no attention. His hat was off. The noon sun beat like a hammer on his tawny head. But nothing mattered to Bart.

That gold star was Jim Blair's!

Dimly, but very dimly, he wondered where that Association man out in the *cuartel* had found Jim's star. But he didn't want to see that man to find out. That man might tell him a tale which would drive him mad, tell him of the dreadful thing of which he had often dreamed—the swollen corpse of Jim Blair. Hope that Blair could be alive, could be that man in the *cuartel,* never came to Bart.

The *jefe* waited patiently a long time for his strange guest to say what must now be done. Then, growing sick because the sun was hot on his head after all the *aguardiente,* he moved away to wait in the shade of his official doorway. The soldiers, their curiosity aroused but only held in suspense, tired presently and began to move out into the square where they could watch for sign of a possible return to their drinking. Proprietors of the *cantinas* stood in their doorways, speculating as to the wisdom of the credit they had recently extended to the fierce young man who seemed now to be at prayer.

Oblivious to all that, Bart knelt.

At last, something akin to relief glimmered in his drawn face. Then in a mighty voice he cried, "Jim, I'll do what ye'd 'a' said to do."

Instantly the soldiers out in the Plaza were all excitement.

But it was not Bart's cry that had stirred them up.

OVER ON the other side in the thickets, Case, alarmed by the report from Huggins, had run up his red flag as prearranged, the signal for the soldiers to bring the prisoner across.

The soldiers, with promise of all the money to be gained by that, wanted to go. But they were afraid of the young man with the gold star. They began though to gather, to gesticulate, to shout encouragement to each other.

Bart had resolved that he would see this Association man safe. That was what he knew Jim would have meant for him to do. Then, if he survived, though he hoped he wouldn't, he would go to Headquarters and tell all the things he had done and either be hanged or go to the pen for life. He was going to come clean with Jim and he knew that was the only way to do it.

He got to his feet with something in his tremendous young face that went with the gold star on his breast. The cries and gestures of the soldiers caught his attention. He looked where all of them were looking—across the river. He saw the red flag and he knew just what it meant. With a dignity he had never shown before, he strode out to the soldiers.

By this time they had made up their minds to risk the danger of him. They were fifty to one and they would get two thousand dollars each from the

Senor Case. One soldier, bolder than the rest, who had his gun with him, levelled it at Bart and called out for him to stop, that they had the signal that Bart had no right to the money now, that it was theirs, that if he tried to stop them, they would kill him.

Bravos went up at that. More guns were levelled.

The fellow who had first threatened let go and the bullet grazed Bart's ear. Reverberation of the shot was echoed by the blast of Bart's sixshooters.

The soldiers broke like sheep. In their wake three men crawled on all fours. Where all had been standing three bodies in white lay motionless.

Bart shouted to the *jefe*. The little man came running. "Senor," he cried gratefully, "you have saved my honor, the honor of my government. Honor shall come to you for the dogs who are dead. This is magnificent."

Bart knew very well that desperate old Case and all his gang would be coming themselves as a last resort, to save their necks. He shouted to the *jefe* to rally his men.

That fat little man shouted the order Bart had given him. Instead of rallying, the whole crew ran more wildly than ever. They raced across the Plaza and disappeared like rabbits into the brush.

Thought of facing that terrible old rancher and the terrible men at his back after they had betrayed their promise to him, was more than they could stand.

Bart ran to his horse, then galloped out to the cut. Against Case's whole force, which would come *en masse* through the deep—though safe—water this side the hidden bar, Bart knew that he couldn't hold the cut long.

Bart spurred his horse into the water, heading for the bar. From the bar he could face them in single file. Five minutes later he was on the bar and down behind his horse.

Case and the men, who had been shouting to him, began to shoot, for, although he could hear what they said, Bart didn't answer them. Bullets plugged his horse and the horse, falling, began to flounder.

Bart shot the animal in the head. The carcass, too heavy to float in the shallow water, settled firmly, and Bart Lyon sheltered himself behind it.

Then came the fight. It would be to the death.

FIRST DALTON started for the bar. Bart let him come within twenty yards, then rose to his knees and shot him from his horse.

On that, the half dozen men who had already started single file in Dalton's wake, all stopped. At a signal from one in the lead, those in the rear turned their horses and started back, one by one.

Bart shouted defiantly, "Yo're through! Yo're goin' to take yore medicine!"

On a great roan horse, Case burst from the thickets fifty yards upstream from the entrance to the ford. For an instant, as the roan plunged into the river, it seemed to lose footing altogether. Then the brute floundered, got its feet and battled out to midstream.

At that, high above the noise of the river, wild yells burst from horsemen plunging in everywhere, some above Case, some at the ford, some below.

Here and there a horse with his rider failed to find footing and went whirling wildly away.

But the followers of the old thief, desperate as he was desperate, maddened too by the wild daring of his example, sight of their fellows spinning away to certain death in the flood was nothing. They screamed at their struggling horses. They shouted wild curses. They brandished their weapons and they came on in wide front toward the bar.

Bart Lyon examined his pistols and waited. He knew that he was going to die. That didn't alarm him. Back of that knowledge he was glad. But what did alarm him was thought that he

might die too soon.

On came the line of battling horses. There were twenty in the line.

Whenever Bart lifted his head to watch their movement, the whole line roared with gunfire and well aimed bullets pounded his breastwork or sang above his head.

When the man nearest him was within fifty yards, Bart shot and killed him. But, as he exposed himself for that shot, a bullet from high up along the line tore through his jaw. For an instant he drooped against the horse, stunned by the shot.

When he pulled out of that and looked up again, he saw five men whirling down the river helplessly on their floundering horses. But more than a dozen still came on. Now they were all in range, close range.

He tried to fire from under cover. Deft marksman as he was, he could not fire quickly enough. Whenever he ducked, they shot at him while he couldn't shoot; whenever he started to put up his head, they were firing before he could fire—and all the time they came closer.

Then he waited, hidden until he knew they were all close. And when he heard Case close at hand, he rose to his full height, shot Case through the heart and, in the raining lead from all the guns, shot it out until his guns were empty and he fell beside his horse.

One man alone, of all who had come against him, faced him then. The rest had either fallen before his fire or had been swept away on their helpless horses. The one man was the slinking little Huggins. He turned his horse and started back.

There were half a dozen bullets through Bart's great body and he knew that he would soon be dying. But he called after Huggins. "Ye kin go for all o' me. 'Twas you, I reckon, that saved me from killin' him what found Jim's star."

THEN BART lay down in the shallow water beside his horse. Little by little he lost clear consciousness as the Great Shadow came, drew back, waited, and came on again. He was slow to die, for he had been a most vital man.

At first he seemed to be going easy, for the water was cool upon his burning body, and all he felt was the deep ache of his wounds. But as he was numbed to that, the thing that he never could forget came back—the agony of thought that he alone had killed Jim Blair.

He was crying about that, when Jim and the *jefe* came.

Blair, a little gray man with a face like a cameo cut in iron—though he was half dead from his months in the *jefe's* dungeon, felt all the strength of life again at sight of Bart alive.

He caught the drift of Bart's half delirious ravings. Lifting Bart's head he told him, "Oh, boy, ye thought ye lied to me, but ye didn't. I knowed Case had tampered with ye. Hit was because I aimed to save ye o' ever'thing that'd ever taint ye 'fore the world, that I laid low down here to hunt him out after I broke from the ambush that got Ike and Tod."

Then the Great Shadow lifted for Bart a little. He roused. He saw Jim. Slowly, what Jim had told him filtered into his dying brain. Then a great light shone in his little gray eyes and he whispered, "They's a good ole Gawd a'mighty yet. He gimme chanst to see ye oncet again, an' mebbe do suthin' kind o' to make up; an' now He lets me go."

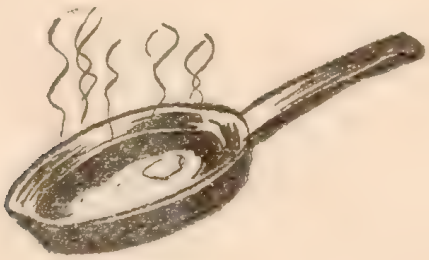
Then his great body stiffened and his head fell back and he was dead. And Jim Blair looked out on the wildly desolate river and wept.

But the song of the wild river, which is triumphant, caught Jim and he thought of it as a requiem for Bart Lyon. And at that, Jim Blair smiled up at the *jefe* and said, "He'll be all right now. Gone he is, where he cain't make no more mistakes."

★

Ellie was glad to have someone with her. Anyone even Len Galoway!

THE TRESPASSER



by Bess Rogers

ELLIE had been at the cabin only a few hours when she saw the rider coming hell for leather up the mill. With a kind of sunk feeling she could see he was hopping mad, even before he drew rein in front and called out a gruff "Hello".

The visit was not entirely unexpected, but Ellie had hoped it would not be so soon. She had passed the Bar S on the way up, a stone house set against tall cottonwoods, an oasis in this parched and dusty land. Some people had all the luck, she had thought wistfully, even here. Like the owner of that Bar S Ranch.

Before going to the door Ellie slipped her recently purchased revolver into the holster at her side. She smoothed her red-gold hair that fell in waves to her shoulders, and brushed some of the dust from her soiled shirt and jeans.

"Hello," she said pleasantly. "I wasn't expecting anyone—"

He was giving out with a repertoire of cuss words that would curl the hair on a stere's hide, but stopped when he realized he was talking to a girl.

"Well, I'll be—" he sputtered. "I thought you was another of them crazy gold hunters that's always cluttering up my ranch. I beg your—" His apology ended suddenly when he saw the new pick and shovel leaning against the cabin. "You're not a—?"

Ellie fixed a smile on her full red lips. "This is my grandfather's claim. He built this cabin."

"It doesn't belong to him now," the man said dryly. Then, "Haven't you heard—?"

She nodded sadly. "I learned that Grandpa had died when I reached Sandstone yesterday. I came up here to live with him and be of some help. But now," tears filled her brown eyes, but she brushed them away quickly, "I'll just have to stay here alone and work his mine."

"Look Miss—" He was trying to shake off his confusion.

"I'm Luella Benton," she said politely. "Called Ellie for short."

"Look, Miss Ellie," he said sharply, "I don't doubt that you're Benton's granddaughter. But this claim sold for the taxes. I bought it. I'm Len Galoway, of the Bar S."

She'd heard of Mr. Galoway in Sandstone. They said he was a real tough hombre sometimes, unless you knew him.

"I'll redeem it when I dig enough gold." She was smiling again.

"There isn't any gold," he said with exasperating positiveness.

"There is." She was just as positive. "Grandpa told me about it when he came to visit us two years ago."

"Did he say he found any on the claim?"

She dropped her eyes before his withering gaze, but none of the determination left her face. "He knew it was here."

"Miss Ellie," he said severely, "I can't have treasure hunters driftin' in here, starting grass fires and using up the water. You'll have to leave."

She dropped dejectedly to the doorstep. "Where'll I go?" she asked forlornly. "I spent all my money—the gold pieces Grandpa gave me two years ago—for the horse and supplies. If I could stay a little while—"

His gray eyes were on her, sizing her up, and Ellie became conscious of her scuffed up old slippers that should have been the new boots she couldn't afford to buy, and her white silk shirt that clung to her in creases.

"You'll have to go back home, wherever it is you came from."

She shook her head vehemently. "I can't go back."

He didn't ask why, and she wouldn't have told him.

"You might get a job in Sandstone," he suggested, "at a cafe or somewhere."

"Why can't I stay here?" she demanded angrily. "I won't hurt your old Bar S. I won't start any grass fires and I won't steal anything."

He pushed his hat to the back of his head, and Ellie saw that he was young, not more than twenty-five. He would have been much better looking if it hadn't been for the angry scowl and the worry lines that marked his face.

"My Aunt Liz, who keeps house for me, saw you down at the water tank a while ago."

Ellie had stopped there to water her horse after the hot, dusty ride from Sandstone. And she had carried a bucketful to the cabin for her own use. It hadn't occurred to her to ask, or that anyone would refuse a drink of water to a thirsty traveler.

She bit her lip to hold back hasty words boiling up in her. But she couldn't control the flush on her cheeks, or the angry sparkle in her brown eyes. "And that's why you rode up here?"

THE WORRY lines deepened on his tanned face. "You see, Miss Ellie, we're in the middle of a terrible drouth here." He looked at the brassy sky, stripped bare of clouds, and the land that lay sizzling under the afternoon sun. "Water is mighty scarce. I've had to sell my stock to the barest minimum. I can't let you have water."

"I wouldn't use much."

"Every drop counts."

"Oh all right then. I'll leave."

"See that you do," he clipped.

Indignantly Ellie turned back into the cabin. But she couldn't help flinging over her shoulder, "I didn't know anyone could be so mean!"

Ellie didn't really intend to leave. She wouldn't give up that easy. Somehow she'd outwit Mr.-High-and-Mighty Galoway; hide the horse in the daytime so he'd think she was gone, and go down for water at night. She was tired of other people having all the luck. She'd stay just as she planned and dig Grandpa's gold.

From her little slit of a window she watched Len Galoway ride slowly back down the hill toward the lovely, cool looking Bar S ranch house.

ELLIE SAT on the bunk that had been her grandfather's and tried to

catch up on her thinking. Things had happened so fast lately.

First there was Eliga Peavy asking her to marry him, and her mother's insistence that she accept. Lige had land, not burned out grazing land, but good valley soil. He had a house in town and stock in the bank.

But he was twice her age, and she didn't love him. He had buried two wives already, and this time he was looking for a young and pretty one. He had promised that Ellie and her mother would never have to work again.

Ellie's mother was tired of getting along on the small wages they both earned at the cafe in the little town of Frontizera where they lived. "I've worked hard to bring you up nice, without no help from no one," she'd told Ellie. "Now you've got a chance to marry into money. I could take it easy the rest of my days. I deserve that much from you, Ellie."

Poor Mom. Ellie's father had died when she was little, leaving all the responsibility on her mother and Granpa Benton. And Grandpa didn't help much. Ellie would have liked to make it easy for her mother.

But she couldn't marry Lige. Her mother didn't understand about love. If she had loved Ellie's father, it was so long ago she had forgotten.

And now Lige and her mother were combining against her. They promised her beautiful clothes, jewelry—everything a girl's heart was set on. Except love.

One day a fear seized Ellie that they would finally wear down her resistance, that she would marry Lige in spite of herself. That was when she packed her few belongings and boarded the train for Sandstone to find Grandpa. It didn't matter if he was rich or not. She would keep house for him, and maybe help in his gold mine.

Her mother had called Grandpa Benton a no-good old drifter. But Ellie had loved him the few times he had been permitted to visit at their home. The last time he was there he had told her about his claim and his gold mine. "Some day I'll be rich, Chickadee," he said. "Then I'll buy a fine house in town and you can live with me." He had given her the gold coins and directions for finding his claim. Just in case.

Ellie hadn't told her mother about the money. She had kept it all, fighting down temptation to buy some of the pretty things she loved.

Grandpa must have died soon after that, for she had never heard from him again. She had not been notified of his death.

Now his claim was sold, and she was a trespasser on Len Galoway's land.

Why had the rancher bought the claim, she wondered. It was nothing but a barren hillside. Was he only pretending he didn't know about the gold to throw her off guard? Wasn't that the real reason he was so dead set against treasure hunters?

Ellie could see now it had been a mistake to mention the gold. She should have pretended some other reason for staying.

Then a thought struck her that made her gasp. Maybe Len Galoway had killed Granpa for his claim! They had told her in Sandstone it was heart failure. But with none of his kin present, there was no telling. She touched the gun at her side, glad she had remembered to bring it.

But it wasn't too late. She had learned in Sandstone that as Grandpa's legal heir she could redeem his claim. If Len Galoway wouldn't let her stay, she would work in Sandstone and save her money until she had enough.

And if she ever did, she thought wrathfully, she would really tell Len Galoway and his mean old aunt what she thought of people who grudged a drink of water to a thirsty horse and a tired girl.

She yawned, and drowsiness overcame her.

MORNING had come when she awoke, and a shaft of faint-gold light struggled in through the slit of a window. For a moment a strange ex-

hilaration permeated her sleep-drugged mind, a sense of something new and wonderful about to happen. She remembered where she was then, and jumped up to carry out her plans for the day.

She went out into the sunshine and gathered an armful of sticks to build a fire in the rusty old stove in the corner. The warmth felt good against the morning chill of the high country, and she was ravenously hungry.

Carefully she measured a little of the stale water she had brought from the tank yesterday, and set coffee to boil. She had biscuits cooked, and was lifting up a slice of bacon when she heard a sound that made her jump and drop the fork back into the frying pan.

Len Galoway was outside again. His voice wasn't as gruff as it had been yesterday, but Ellie knew he was here to see if she had gone, and to try again to get her off the claim.

Hastily she buckled on the gun belt and opened the door, a small but determined slip of a girl in her late teens. The sunlight caught in her red-gold hair, making a bright frame for the pale oval of her face that hadn't yet acquired a New Mexico tan.

The rancher touched his big hat and dismounted without invitation. "Morning, Miss Ellie," he greeted amiably. "I hope I'm not too early."

His anger of yesterday was gone. He had shaved and put on a clean shirt, and Ellie decided he wasn't so bad looking after all. She could see that his jaw had a stubborn set, but there was also a certain amount of hard good humor on his wind-burned face.

"I was just having breakfast," she said, and because she thought it might be best to pretend friendliness, added, "Will you have a biscuit and a cup of coffee?"

"Don't mind," he said. "Smells good."

He drank the coffee as soon as the tin cup had cooled sufficiently, and ate the biscuit in two bites.

He smiled genially. "I see you're a good cook."

"I had to learn," she answered, remembering the months she had spent in the hot kitchen at the cafe in Frontizera.

He was silent for a minute, and the silence made Ellie uncomfortable. She knew he was here for a purpose, and she wished he'd state it.

He seemed to have guessed her thoughts, for he said, "Look, Miss Ellie, you think your grandfather had a gold mine here. I'd like to show you the place this morning, let you explore as much as you like, until you're convinced of your mistake. Is that fair?"

"I—I don't know." She was right. He had returned to try again to put her her off. But he was doing it in a nice way. If he convinced her there was no treasure, then she would leave. But of course he intended to steer her away from the gold. "I'm going to the mine right away and start digging."

At first she thought he was going to laugh, but only a faint smile crinkled the corners of his eyes. "I'll help you."

She set the soiled plate and cups down with a bang, and eyed him warily. "Why should you?"

"Pay for my breakfast," he grinned.

It might be a ruse, but she would take a chance and see what happened. She tied a red bandana around her hair and moved toward the door. "I'm ready."

"We'll need a lantern," he said, following. "It's dark in the tunnel."

"I have one, and a little oil. It must have been Grandpa's."

A SHORT way up behind the cabin the mouth of a tunnel made a dark spot on the side of the mountain. Diggings from the abandoned mine were a red-gray welt below the hole. Sagging timbers loomed inside.

"I've heard rumors that a small vein of gold was once found higher up on the mountain," Len told her. "But it faulted out. John Benton must have thought he could pick it up down here."

"He must have had a good reason,"

Ellie laughed, "if I know my grandpa. Digging this tunnel was a lot of work."

"There's rules for calculating such things," Len said, "but I doubt that your grandfather knew them."

"Do you know them?"

He shook his head. "I'm not a miner. I'm supposed to be a rancher, but I'm beginning to doubt that I know the rules for anything."

His voice held a note of bitterness, and Ellie couldn't help feeling a little sorry. "After all, you can't help the drouth."

There was barely room to stand erect in the tunnel, and it was so narrow they had to squeeze through single file. Len walked in front carrying the lantern and pick. Ellie carried the shovel and a caved-in old bucket. At the end there was a clutter of broken and rusted miner's tools, among them a hand drill that might be used. It was dank and musty, and Ellie had an oppressive feeling of being trapped. She was glad to have someone with her—anyone, even Len Galoway.

Len put down the lantern and set to work, and Ellie could see the ripple of hard muscles under his shirt. Laboriously the pick bit into the rock, scattering small pieces on the tunnel floor. Ellie shoveled them up and put them into the rusty bucket. When it was full, Len carried it to the outside.

Ellie felt a strange heat kindling inside her, and excitement she had never experienced before, as they carefully examined the rock fragments. Len's eyes, too, held an eager brilliance. But there was nothing this time, and they dumped the rocks onto the red-gray pile and went back inside to repeat the procedure.

While they were working, they talked, and Ellie lost her suspicions, though she still had the gun. She found herself telling him of her life in Frontizera with her mother, about Lige Peavy and the reason she had run away.

By mid-afternoon she was dead tired and wanted to call it a day. She was thankful for Len's iron strength and endurance.

"What we need," he said, "is a charge of dynamite. It would be easier and faster."

Ellie agreed that it would.

They tried the old hand drill and found that it would work, slanting it downward into the rock.

"I'll bring the dynamite tomorrow morning," Len promised. "I often use it to blast out my tanks."

"Len," she said, as they walked back to the cabin, "you say there isn't any gold here. Then why have you worked so hard today?"

A slow smile started from his eyes and crawled across his face. "I reckon the prospector's urge got into my blood. Curiosity, you might call it, with a little mixture of hope; wanting to know what the next stroke of the pick, or the next charge of dynamite will tell. Maybe that's good, whether there's any gold or not. It keeps people going."

"At least they don't lay down and die of despair," she agreed.

As he was starting to leave, he turned to her suddenly. "Tell you what, Ellie. Before I set the fuse in the morning, I'll take you where the gold is, if you'd like to go."

"You mean—!" She stared at him in dazed unbelief. "The vein higher up on the mountain—you really know where to find gold!"

He nodded. "Plenty. Without a stroke of the pick."

"And you want to show me your gold mine!" It was incredible! But of course he wasn't serious. "All right, Len, what's the catch?"

"Only that you get up an hour before sunrise and climb a few hills."

She looked at him for a long moment, trying to figure some ulterior motive, or some hidden meaning. But he met her gaze with steady, clear eyes.

"I'll go," she agreed.

ELLIE had a little difficulty going to sleep that night. Excitement in her was strong, and there were many

questions she couldn't answer. If Len had discovered gold, why had he made nothing of it? Why was he trusting Ellie Benton, almost a stranger, with his discovery?

When she finally did fall asleep it was to dream of gold, gold, gold, that glittering yellow metal that would buy all the things she had ever wanted, assure her mother of a life of ease.

She awoke with the first faint touch of dawn in the east, conscious of a tingling excitement she didn't understand at first. Then, catching her breath, she remembered Len Galoway was going to lead her to his gold mine. She dressed hastily and snatched a hurried breakfast.

She was ready when Len appeared, red bandana around her hair, and a light wool jacket against the morning chill.

With barely a nod of greeting, he led her up the mountainside past the tunnel. He was leading her to riches, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow! Her heart beat thunderously against her jacket as she walked beside him, and she did not attempt to break his silence. They walked so for about a mile with no sound except the crushing of short dead grass and the slipping of rocks beneath their feet. Once she stumbled, and his strong arms caught her, steadying her against him for a minute. Then they continued, following a dim trail that led upward, winding and turning until they came to a level ledge overlooking a tiny valley.

"This is it," he said.

Ellie stood wide-eyed, gazing at the blue mist in the valley, and the silver topped hills surrounding it. In the distance a snow cap turned all the colors of the rainbow.

The sun came up then, its golden light leaping from hill to hill, until the whole rugged country was a symphony of color. The golden light came at last to rest on the tanned face of Len Galoway, seeming to endow him with a deep and unsuspected inner quality.

She reached out and touched his hand. "I like your gold, Len."

His strong fingers closed around her hand, and something real and vital passed between them.

They stood watching until the golden light faded, and the blue mist rose from the valley. Purple shadows in the folded hills melted into the clear, discerning light of day.

She looked at him then and saw the smoothing out of the rapt expression from his dark, sensitive face. His voice was flat when he said, "My gold has vanished, Ellie."

They turned from the timeless peace and quiet of the valley and walked back down the mountain.

At the tunnel, Len said, "I'll set the charge now, Ellie. You go on down the hill, well out of the way."

"But Len, if there's any danger—"

"None at all," he assured her. "I can easily get out before the explosion."

"Be careful, Len. Oh do be careful."

HE JOINED her again in a short time and took her arm as they walked toward the cabin. She clung to him, expecting an earth shaking explosion, but when it came it was only a low, rumbling and spewing. As far as they could tell nothing at all happened at the mine.

"Better not go inside for a while," he cautioned. "There might be falling rocks."

She knew it was true, but she would have given a great deal to examine some of the fragments knocked loose by the explosion.

Back at the cabin she walked with him to his horse. Before he mounted, she touched his arm. "I like your gold, Len," she said again. "I like it much better than Lige Peavy's."

He looked at her for a long time, and it seemed to Ellie that eternity was in his eyes. Then he shook his head slowly. "You don't quite understand, Ellie. I have nothing to offer you. I have nothing at all except this

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Chad had promised this pioneer woman to protect her husband, who was out to gamble with the last of their stake. And since he knew all the games in town were crooked, he had to see to it that Volney didn't get started at all.

LAWMAN'S PROMISE

by WALLACE McKINLEY

CHAD SAUNTERED out toward the mover's camp: emigrants were moving east and west. It was on the edge of Trail Junction. That evening, a dozen covered wagons were on the ground. All the outfits but one, were drawn up fairly close together. The one was away out in the prairie.

He strolled up through the main body, his hard blue eyes covertly alert. The horses and wagons looked good—the people cheerful. All the women and children and a good many of the men stared a little fearfully at him. For, being marshal at Trail Junction, he wore two Navy revolvers, and the walnut handles of the guns, thrusting from the lapels of his coat, and the hard glint in his blue eyes, made him a little terrifying to tenderfeet.

He paid little attention to these inexperienced people; he seldom had any business with their kind. They were too timid and too prosperous, as a rule, ever to make any trouble. He passed through their ranks without opening his mouth to any of them.

Then, as he got a better view of the solitary outfit, his step quickened a little and his hard eyes became more openly alert. He didn't saunter toward this last outfit; he strode toward it.

It looked like the running gears of ruin. The wagon was an old wreck with half the cover gone; the bones of the horses were coming through their hides and one of the animals was stone blind. Both were so spiritless that, though neither was roped nor hobbled, they didn't try to graze.

On the wagon doubletree, his head buried in his hands, sat a gaunt and ragged man. Twenty feet to one side of him, with a baby on her arm and three other children, all of them small, huddling around her, a woman stirred something in an iron pot. The one pot was all she had on her fire.

Coming up to the man, Chad spoke to him—civilly.

The man looked up. His eyes were like a hawk's; his face cruelly stern. He nodded at Chad as though the marshal were a million miles away and as though that were Chad's proper dis-

tance. Then he buried his head again in big rough hands.

It was Chad's business to learn all he could about such hard-looking birds of passage. He often found it necessary to trace such fellows after they were gone. So he stepped over the wagon tongue toward the woman and her children. At sight of him the baby jumped upon its mother's arm. The other little fellows looked up into Chad's face with friendly eagerness. Then they resumed their stare at the iron pot, from which came the odor of boiling mush.

The woman looked up and said, "Good evenin' mister," but instantly resumed her stirring in the iron pot.

She was young, and she had a good strong face. But she had the hunted, haunted look of all women whom the West had whipped, and who, with their menfolk, were beating back.

Chad touched his hat apologetically, then, as apologetically, asked their name, their destination and the last place they had called home.

Her answers were straightforward. Their name was Volney. They were bound for Illinois. She gave the name of the town; also she gave the name of a farmer near that town. They were going back to work for that farmer—she to cook for the farmer's hired men, her husband to make a common hand. They had homesteaded a hundred miles further west, and had proved up on their land. It was good land, but two dry years in succession had starved them out. If they got back to Illinois they would be all right. After a few years' work they would save a thousand dollars. Then they would come back and win, perhaps, regardless of the weather.

Just as there was no evasion about the woman, neither was there any whine or complaint.

CHAD'S HARD blue eyes shone with fine approval as he listened. When her brief statement ended, he swept off his big white hat, and said, in genuine heartiness, "Ma'am, I shorely wish you luck."

She looked gratefully at him and said, "We air goin' to need it." Then, as though she were ashamed of having admitted so much defeat, she looked into the pot and began to stir violently.

Chad turned and started hastily away.

" 'Bye, mister," the three kids called after him in their clear little voices. "Goodbye."

He had barely passed the rear of the wagon when he heard someone right at his heels. He turned.

It wasn't the man—it was the woman. There were tears in her eyes. She said, "I hain't no right to ast it, but you seem human an' my man is desprit. We got nigh a thousant mile to go afore they's any 'surance of a tap o' work for him. We got jist fourteen dollars left. Nary 'nother thing. Sam even traded his rifle an' his pistol to get our wagon an' our harness fixed so we could start. I'm afeared that in spite o' me, Sam will go up into the gamblin' halls in this here town. Mister, ef he does that an' you see him, won't you git him away an' fetch him back? We got so little."

Chad shifted uneasily on his feet. His lean face colored slightly. There were twenty gambling halls in Trail Junction. They were mainstays of the town. They raised most of the revenues; and they absolutely ran the place. In competition with each, touts of rival houses frequently fought gun battles in the street. To attempt taking anybody out of the clutches of that greedy crew would cost a man his life. More than that, Doc Burnside, who owned *The Palace,* biggest and finest of all the gambling halls, was mayor of the town. And Doc, who gave Chad his orders and saw to payment of his salary, had warned him a dozen times

that under no circumstance should he ever listen to such appeals as this.

But this uncomplaining woman, her cheerful kids, and her man, sternly silent in his ruin, had appealed powerfully to the hardgrained marshal. They had but fourteen dollars anyhow. And every hall in town, even *The Palace*, was more or less crooked.

"Ma'am," said Chad at last, hopefully, "ef you kin keep him here until I have time to git around, mebbe I kin fix it in a way. I wouldn't durst try to take him out o' a game ef he got into one. But ef I kin have time to see the boys ahead o' him comin' I might could git their word to bar him from their games. That's all you want? Jis' keep him from losin' his money?"

That was all she wanted. She thanked him gratefully.

Then he went, hurriedly.

THE GAMBLING houses, like all other places in the town, were all on the one long, poorly built-up street. The first one he came to, known as *The Temple of Fortune*, he didn't enter.

Black John, a beady-eyed man with long waxed moustache, owned the *Temple*. From the end of the bar inside the wide open door, Black John lowered at Chad as he came along.

John ran the worst place in town. Every game in it was crooked. A man who went in there and sat down at a game never got out of the place with a cent. If he caught on to the raw stuff before it broke him, and he tried to get out, somebody found a quarrel; somebody else slugged him in the back of the head; and, when he came to outside, his pockets were always empty.

As mayor, Doc Burnside had several times threatened to close John's place in the interests of the town. John, of course, hated Doc for that; and, hating Doc, he naturally hated Chad, whom he called "the tool."

Chad went on up to Crook Burns' place. Crook was a big, fat, squinty-eyed man, and one of the smoothest schemers in town. He bilked everybody, of course, but doing that quite successfully and, being at bottom good-natured, he was inclined to be, at times, really generous. It was a fact that on several occasions, after cheating a fellow out of all his money, Crook had given the money back and more with it, when he discovered that the fellow's family was in need.

"Shore," said Crook, waving one of his fat hands, "I'll look out for him and put up the quarantine sign when he comes in."

There were seven or eight men in town, including Black John, to whom there was no use in Chad going. They were all envious of Doc Burnside. Crook could do anything he wanted with those fellows because, though he was in with Doc Burnside hand and glove, he pretended to be at outs with him. So Chad asked Crook to speak to Black John and the rest about Volney.

Crook put up his eyebrows. Then, a little dryly, he said: "You puttin' yourself to a helluva lot o' trouble, an' asting me to go to a whole lot just for fourteen dollars. Here, I'll give you fourteen dollars to give to the outfit in the mornin'. Hain't no good way anyhow startin' examples like this." And, pulling three five dollar gold pieces from his pocket, he concluded. "Let the odd dollar go."

"No," said the marshal, "that won't do." Then he went on to explain that if Volney got into a crooked game, somebody was pretty sure to get killed; and as that somebody would be Volney. Volney's family would suffer a loss that all the generosity of Trail Junction would never make up.

The fat gambler could see that, of course. But he said, angrily, "I do this for you, next thing you'll be wantin' the right to take fellers from the games after they've set down. No, I'll bar this bird from my house ef he comes 'long. I said I would an' I will. But this other —I'll be damned ef I will."

"Look here, Crook," said the marshal, "you gotta come through! I, Gawd, I promised that feller's woman an' you gotta come. Ef you don't, this little play o' yore's an' Doc's—for you to be mayor after he gits ever-body down on him for runnin' things for you an' him— By Gawd, I'll tear it down beginnin' from the minute this feller Volney finds hisse'f in one o' them houses."

Crook's squinty eyes rolled and his fat face turned purple. "Damn you!" he stormed. "I'll have a talk with Doc 'bout you."

"Talk an' be damned to you. While yo're a-talkin' to him, I'll be talkin' too. Yo're a-comin' through, Crook Burns, as shore as Gawd made gamblers. I promised that feller's woman. I got you. You can't do nothin' to me. Yore star an' Doc's—I keer a lot for it, don't I? Yo're comin' through, or I'll tear you both wide open an' you know it."

"Then, damn you, have it ef you have to. I'll see 'em, then, to shut your blasted mouth. I'll guarantee 'em, too to bar this bird."

He stormed out of his place. But he went straight for Black John's. Chad didn't bother to look after him. Crook's word, once he gave it, no matter how it might be wrung from him, could be counted on with certainty.

THE MARSHAL hurried on up the street. He still had a dozen men to see. Night was coming on. The Anchor trail outfit, which had traditions of painting all the towns they passed, had camped that afternoon for the night out at Dry Lake, a couple of miles west. Any minute, some of the Anchor trail hands who didn't know him—because he hadn't been marshal at Trail Junction long—might come and give him plenty to do. And he didn't want to be bothered.

He didn't have any real trouble anywhere that he stopped. A few of the proprietors, like Crook, had a grain of decency to which Chad made his appeal. The others, he cajoled or threatened. One way or another, he got a promise from every one he called on and he wasn't long in any one place.

But all the places took time.

At last he had seen everybody but Doc Burnside. Doc's place, which was high-toned, was far up the street, two blocks beyond the last of the others.

He was just about half way up from the last one, on his way to *The Palace*, when, up in the deep dusk ahead, a shot rang out—then four or five shots, followed by a medley of wild yells and the hoofbeats of horses coming at dead run.

Chad, of course, couldn't stand for that sort of thing. If he allowed the boys to think they could do that, next thing they would run all over him.

Jumping out into the middle of the street, he waited for them. He didn't have a second to spare.

Out of the dusk they appeared suddenly, between him and *The Palace*.

There were six of them. They raced abreast, spanning the street. The outside fellows were spurring their horses, trying to get them up on the walks. Every fellow had his revolver out, waving it, shooting, now and then, and all the time whooping at the top of their voices. Their horses were simply flying. As soon as they caught sight of Chad, they all rode in together as if they meant to ride him down.

He threw up his hands and ordered them to stop. Beyond separating their horses a little, they paid no attention. They came right on to bluff him.

He settled himself and, when they came thundering down on him with not much more than room enough between the two middle horses for him to stand without being knocked down, he jumped, grabbed one of the horses by the reins and hung on till his weight dragged the running beast to a dead stop.

The boy on that horse, of course, didn't try to do a thing. They had just

been trying Chad out. The other lads, having seen enough, holstered their guns, bottled their yells and beat it right on down the street, trying to get away.

Letting them get away wouldn't do, either.

Chad told the puncher, who was from the Anchor trail outfit, that he would have to take the horse.

"Shore," the fellow chuckled. "Take my spurs, too. I want ye to ketch the damn fools. Mis'ry loves comp'ny. I don't want to be the only one ketched." And, jumping down, he did start to unbutton his spurs.

Chad didn't wait for the spurs, which was an oversight on his part. He jumped on the horse and headed straight down the street at a fast trot.

When he came to the end of the street, there were the five boys sitting their horses just a little way out in the dusk toward the mover's camp. He tried to get up to them without their recognizing him. But he was so much bigger and taller than the fellow they knew belonged on that horse, that they knew what was up.

With yells of derision, they wheeled their horses and spurred off down the trail right through the mover camp.

CHAD TOOK after them. But the horse he was on, discovering the absence of spurs, wouldn't run—he just took a gallop. And that was the way Chad went through the mover's camp—the boys whooping in the darkness ahead of him.

All the mover stock seemed to be stampeded, horses running everywhere, and, as he dashed through the last of the camp, he heard a horse crash into a wagon and he heard someone yell, "Indians!"

He didn't stop, of course.

A couple of miles further on he overtook the boys. They had stopped again. Their horses were winded and they couldn't get away. They gave up without argument.

"Shore," laughed one fellow by the name of Higgins, "we'll go back an' be proud to pay our fines. We all from Texas. We done set out to get eddicated 'bout joggerfy. We shore proud to pay for our schoolin' when we kit git some." All that any of them asked was that he wouldn't make them hurry right back on their badly blown horses.

When they told him that none of the other boys from their outfit would be in that evening, he saw no reason at all to hurry back.

He hadn't forgotten, not for a minute, his failure to see Doc Burnside in the matter of Volney; but that didn't worry him. All the games in Doc's place, except the faro bank, were always on the square. Even the faro bank was square, unless somebody went after it with a big winning from one of the other games, or played in a streak of luck that threatened to break it. Of course, in either of those cases, Doc who was at bottom the coldest proposition in the town, would take the bank from whomever was dealing. Then Doc, who always dealt from a box with a jogger in it, would get his money back and more, if the other fellow had it.

Homesteaders hardly ever drifted into Doc's place. It was too tony. Chad wasn't in the least uneasy about Volney getting into trouble in Doc's place. He might stray up there and lose his fourteen dollars. If he did, there would be no harm done. Doc was a great poser. He liked to play philanthropist when small amounts were involved. And Chad knew that Doc would jump at the chance to give the fourteen dollars back to Volney, if Doc got it—using it, of course, to head a subscription for the family.

But, though the marshal was easy in his mind about the homesteader's fourteen dollars, he couldn't get that family off his mind. And, discovering right away that Higgins and the other boys were like most trail hands—simple

good-hearted fellows—he began to tell them about the Volneys.

The boys listened. When he told them how gritty those folks were, they were really interested. After Chad had finished, they rode along quite a way in the darkness slowly and without a word.

Then Higgins spoke up. He wanted to chip in a dollar for those folks, if Chad would agree to give it to them. The other boys said they would each give a dollar. Hart said that he would chip in, too, and that on their way past the mover camp they would stop at Volney's wagon.

Accordingly, they made up the little purse, and went on.

Volney's wagon, out by itself, was the first one they came to. Everything was dark and there was no sign of a campfire. But they rode up just the same, and Chad called.

NEITHER Volney nor his wife was at the wagon. From his bed in the wagon, Volney's boy, a lad of eight, answered, "We all tored up. Bill—he's our old brown—he's dead. Got skeared, he did, at some fellers ridin' on a run through here. See Bill, he's blind. He run into one the other mover wagons an' he killed hisse'f. Ma an' Andrew Jackson—he's our baby—they over there where Bill is. Ma, she feels awful bad 'bout Bill. But Andrew Jackson, he don't keer a snap. See, he's just a baby, though. He don't know nothin'. Bill, he was a good horse. He never went blind, neither, till 'bout a year ago, after Dad come home from workin' in the gole mines."

"An' where is yore daddy?" Chad asked.

"Oh, Dad? He's gone to town to gamble. Ma said he could. Ma, she don't like gamblin' less'n Dad wins. But we gotta have 'nother horse so we kin go on to Illinoise, an' my Dad, he win a thousant dollars onct. That's how we come west to homestid, 'fore Andrew Jackson an' these other little shavers was borned. We got a good homestid too, an' we goin' back again an' tough 'er out, when we git back to Illinois an' Dad he gits 'nother start."

"Boy," said Higgins enthusiastically, "you all don't want to go back to Illinois. You all wants to stay right here in this country. You all don't want no horse neither. What you all want to travel with is a pair o' Mexican eagles, an' you stay out here. Us Anchors, we all shore ketch 'em for you."

Higgins and the boy didn't come to any definite arrangement, so Chad hurried the party over to the main camp.

Mrs. Volney was over there, at one of the fires. With Andrew Jackson on her arm, she squatted in the firelight, laughing gaily and chatting lightly with the tenderfeet women.

One of those ladies was a poetess. She had the tenderfoot's instinct for dramatic values on the frontier. She was going to compose an heroic ballad on Bill, the blind crowbait, who had rammed his head between the spokes of a wagon wheel and fallen over sidewise, breaking his neck because his head stuck fast.

Although Mrs. Volney's talk and laughter were mildly gay, the gleam of her eyes in the leaping firelight showed that her gaiety was that of maddest desperation.

Chad led her aside. He explained about the six dollars—then offered them.

She didn't reach for the money. She was standing with her back to the fire. Never had Chad seen a woman stand so fine and straight.

"No," she said. "I don't durst take it, after I tole you whut I did 'bout keepin' Sam from gamblin'. Being a woman, I changed my mind about hit an' tole him to go an' see ef he could make a stake for us. Ef he does, we won't need yore charity. Ef he loses, then this here would go like whut we

had. They hain't no sense in me a-takin' it. You keep it. Ef he loses, I reckon we'll soon be so downtrodden that we kin take it an' be afeared to resk throwin' a cent of it away."

There was nothing to be said to that. Chad didn't try.

She went on, "I know you done yore best, mister, to fix it so Sam couldn't gamble. But he's been gone over a hour now. He's boun' to have found a place. Mister, I'm glad o' that, an' I thank you jist the same. Whutever we're headed for I know you aimed to be our friend." Then her voice broke very slightly as she concluded, "Mister, I want to ast you one more thing. Ef Sam's luck don't break for him, he may do somethin' awful. My Sam, he loves us. 'Fore he'll let us go to hell, he'll rob an' kill. Mister, ef somethin' happens, you'll give Sam a chanc't, won't you, so that we kin see my Sam alive again? He'll come to us. He'll never try to git away."

The marshal tore at the collar of his shirt. But he said evenly, "Ma'am, don't cross that bridge till you git to it. Whutever happens I'll do my best for yore man to git back. Not to stay, though—jist to say goodbye."

"Thanky," she said, without a tremor in her voice.

Then he went swiftly to the Anchors, who sat their horses off in the night a little way.

BY THIS time the trailhands had realized their responsiility for the death of the old blind horse. Their wild racing through the camp had frightened him, of course.

"We gotta square that up somehow," Higgins told Chad. "We shore gotta do hit."

But Chad had no time to talk of that. "I gotta git hold o' that feller quick as I kin," he said. "C'mon. He'll be at *The Palace*, where I'm takin' you." And, jumping on his commandeered horse, he led the way at a gallop out of the camp, then up the dimly lighted street.

It was nearly half a mile to *The Palace*. All the way Chad watched for Volney in the crowds which dribbled here and there from the lighted doorways of saloons and gambling halls. He didn't see Volney, and he told the boys, when at last they got down in front of *The Palace*, that if they had met and passed the homesteader, the fellow must be all right because there had been no sign of disturbance anywhere along.

"Like's not," he said, hopefully, "the feller's hit one o' Doc's little games, made hisse'f some hoss money, an' gone his way rejoicin'."

Eager to make sure, he led his culprits directly into the gambling hall instead of taking them round to the barroom to Doc, who, he knew, would be in the office.

The gambling hall was a big one, and brilliantly lighted. There were a dozen tables; several for stud, two for monte, two for roulette, one for dice, and up at the far end that one for the biggest game of all—the faro bank.

Two big stud games were going. At two of those tables good sized crowds looked on. There was excitement, too, at the faro bank. Men swarmed around that distant table, their big hats hiding every face in deep shadows cast by the brilliant chandelier directly overhead.

All the other tables in the hall were deserted except for their keepers, who lounged, watching their banks, waiting for players to come.

Chad led his little party up to the nearest empty table. It was for the old army game—dice.

That was the smallest game in the house and the one which homesteaders generally tackled. A sullen fellow named Turk kept that game. Chad described Volney to him, then asked if Volney had been in.

Turk spat, and said angrily, "Damn

fool come in here an' started on aces for two bits. He lost, but he doubled, and he kept a-losin' an' doublin' till he had up ten dollars. Then damn fool throwed six aces, tuk sixty dollars from me, and jist chawed ahead till he broke my bank."

Hart and the trailhands laughed delightedly. That bank was a hundred dollars.

Then Chad asked, "An' he takened his winnin' an' left?"

"Don't see nothin' of him round here do ye?" said Turk with all surliness.

The stud game at Doc's two big tables were always high. A man couldn't sit down to either of those big tables unless he had two hundred dollars. Even with the army game bankroll in his pocket, Volney was barred from those tables.

Though Volney's boy had said that Volney was no piker as a gamester, and had said, too, that Volney had worked in gold mines, it never occurred to Chad that the homesteader might have gone to the faro layout, for that was a game which homesteaders rarely tried to play.

"C'mon, boys," said Chad hastily. "I gotta take you to Doc Burnside's all right. He's gone back to his folks. C'mon, le's git you through this little business. Then we won't have nothin' on our minds. We'll come back here then an' see that faro game. Big faro's somethin' to watch."

Then he led the bunch out through the barroom and back to Doc's office.

Doc sat at his desk counting a good-sized pile of silver—day's receipts of *The Palace* bar. He was a trim little man of forty, with gray eyes which glinted like steel. His eyes were chilling and made people creepy, even when he laughed. He kept right on counting money while Hart told about the boys whooping it up.

Then, pausing to recount a pile of quarters, he turned round and asked, "Where'd you boys liquor up at?"

They hadn't had a drink. They had just come in right off the prairie on their run. But Higgins, who was a fine, tall, candid looking boy, said eagerly, "Oh, we all got lit up right here in yore place."

"That case," said Doc with his most engaging smile which made him look more like a little tiger than a man, "won't be no fine, boys. Good customers o' mine is good friends o' mine. Jist keep yore kale an' spend it round here in my place."

Then he went right on counting at his bar receipts.

CHAD SAID nothing. He wasn't surprised, and he wasn't disgusted. He was used to Doc. He led the boys back into the barroom.

Higgins yawned and said, "Wonderful mayor. Spend yore money in his place, be all right to chop man's haid off I reckon. Shore it would. This is powerful disappintin'. We all come in to prize up hell an' put a chunk onder it. Only way I see to do it, is to go to some o' these other jints an' buy a seegar or mebbe git our boots blacked. That there'd be penitentiary 'fence. C'mon, fellers, cain't waste no time in here. Nor no money neither. We gotta git action on our money where it counts."

Then all of them, laughing fit to burst, started out. But they took only a few steps when they turned around to Chad, who, by this time was at the door of the gambling room. They all shook hands with him, assured him that they wouldn't make any more trouble for him, and they earnestly begged him to go with them. Now they had no fines to pay, they had money on which they hadn't counted. And now that they had money, they wanted to do something toward paying for Volney's old horse.

The five dollars they had made up and which Chad still had, was fair price for that old crowbait. Chad told them that that was already fixed, and

[*Turn To Page* 84]

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being a faro enthusiast, he wanted them to go with him into the hall to watch the big game.

"Oh, no," said Higgins. "We all from Texas. We oncivilized. We got no business hangin' round sich a sweet place as this'n. We're plum savidges. But you all go watch that game. We'll jist wait outside for you."

They were in dead earnest. They wanted nothing to do with Doc's place, and they really wanted Chad to go with them down to Volney's wagon, as soon as he would.

"All right," he told them. "I won't be long."

Then they went out into the street and he entered the gambling hall again.

The crowd up at the faro bank now was big—bigger than before. And as Chad's eyes lighted on it, the suddenly tensed attitude of the spectators warned him that the big play he loved to see was on. He fairly ran.

Only one place offered him any chance to see. That was by the wall directly behind Pennell, who was dealing for the bank. By tiptoeing and looking over Pennell's shoulder, Chad knew that he could see something of the layout.

He occupied his chosen place. But he didn't try to glimpse the layout at first. His attention, when he got that close, was instantly riveted by the conduct and appearance of Pennell.

Pennell's back was to Chad, of course. But Chad could see one side of his face, which was always very white.

On the side of Pennell's white forehead, sweat welled out in big blobs which glistened, then vanishing down his cheek, were instantly succeeded by others.

Instead of sitting to deal, as faro dealers usually did, Pennell stood. Rather, he crouched. His narrow shoulders were drawn in until they crowded his neck, like those of a man expecting a heavy blow to fall.

Pennell was waving his right hand

[*Turn To Page* 86]

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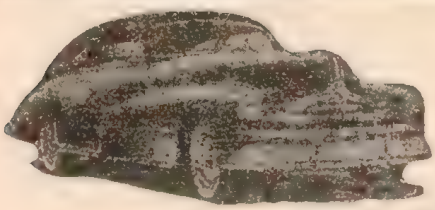

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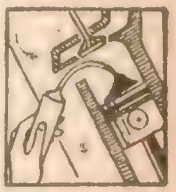

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above the layout to signal the close of bets. Generally, his hand, which was slender, made that gesture with finely undulating grace. Now his hand and his whole arm shook as though the palsy had him.

Everything up there around the layout, where more than fifty men were gathered, was still as death. Nobody seemed even to breathe.

From somewhere over beyond the layout, twenty feet away in the crowd some man barely breathing, whispered, "He called the turn twict in secession. An' they's but the one turn left now in the box."

That faint awed whisper fell distinctly on Chad's ear. Vastly excited at the thought of such mastery of the deepest of all the games, he rose on tiptoes to see what sort of man was playing.

But one man bucked the game.

That man was Volney.

BETWEEN his ragged sleeves were stacks and piles of gold pieces His stern face was granite now. Out of it his hawk eyes simply blazed, a'l the while flitting like lightning—now at Pennell, now at his bet which was straight up on the queen of spades with help, and now at the case-keeper.

The bank, which always opened with two thousand dollars, was down a third or more. The case-keeper, a shriveled man, sat with hands thrown up palm outward almost level with his face. His eyes were starting from his head.

With mighty effort, Pennell took a card from the box. The card fell from his shaking hand before he could lay it down for case. It fell face downward. He turned it over.

It was the queen of spades. Jerking all over, Pennell pulled the other card to make the turn.

That last card in the box was helper for the queen.

Up at the end of the table, the lookout, a big fat man with a sixshooter

[*Turn To Page* 88]

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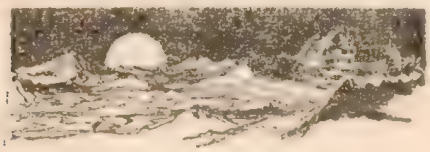

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beside him, methodically counted out in twenty pieces—nine hundred dollard in gold. With a sickly grin on his fat face, he shoved the tall stack toward Volney's eagerly clutching hands.

With querulous profanity, the casekeeper jumped up, gathered his deck, flopped it a-scatter on the shuffle board, and said that he absolutely had to leave the layout for a minute. Then he fought his way out through the crowd.

In desperation, Chad looked at Volney.

Volney didn't have to go back to Illinois. He had a man's stake now. With that gloriously desperate, gloriously eager family of his, he could go back to his battle with the homestead, and it might be in the cards that he could win! If he waited for another deal, he would get it from Doc Burnside. Beyond all doubt the casekeeper had gone for Doc. And the deepest man that ever lived would go down the line like lightning when Doc took the deal, because Doc dealt with a crooked box.

Volney suspected nothing. He hadn't shifted in the least from his position. His granite look hadn't softened in the least. His blazing eyes were on the remnant of the bank.

The lookout had stacked the remnant of the bank. Three hundred dollars left!

In desperation, Chad tried to catch the unsuspecting gamester's eye.

Volney never took his eyes off the properties of the game.

Touts in the crowd, and there were a dozen, stared now at Volney with sardonic grins, now with warning scowls at any spectator who seemed about to speak.

Things waited for Doc Burnside and his crooked box.

Sweat glistened on the marshal's forehead. Suddenly leaping high, he

[*Turn To Page* 90]

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flung up his right hand. Volney didn't notice.

The lynx-eyed touts did, and they had no love for Chad. From their various positions in the crowd, they started fighting toward him.

He started fighting his way in toward the layout.

They wanted no disturbance. They pushed and shoved as quietly as they could. And Chad, knowing himself one to twelve—for he knew that Volney was unarmed and that there would be no help from the crowd, except as the crowd shielded him—took care himself to do nothing that would start a stampede.

He was half way in toward Pennell, when Watson, a big, sombre-eyed man with mouth just a slit, suddenly barred his way.

Watson had started from the other side of the table, from a position directly behind the yet unsuspicious Volney. A big man, far heavier than the marshal, though not so tall, he thrust up his face toward Chad's and hissed, "Ye would, would ye? I'll kill ye ef ye try it."

There were a hundred men in Trail Junction whose one article of burning faith was that no man should be allowed to live a minute if he presumed to pull any outsider from any gambler's game.

But these Volneys had appealed powerfully to Chad.

The marshal's hard blue eyes opened wide and staring. "Volney," he cried in a voice that rang and echoed through the hall, "go! They'll crook you now. The next dealer—" He didn't finish with his speech to Volney.

Watson, supposed to be chain lightning with a gun, started to draw. He was a man of speed.

"Out o' my fire!" screamed the marshal; and the roar of his Navy echoed on his voice.

[*Turn To Page 92*]

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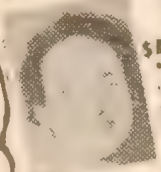

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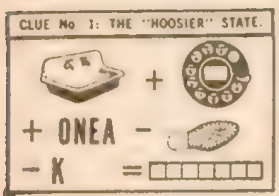

You will see there are a SINK, a DIAL, the SOLE of a shoe and various letters of the alphabet. There are two plus and two minus signs. It is necessary to add and subtract the names and letters as shown by the plus and minus signs. First, write down SINK. Then, add DIAL to it. Next, add ONEA. All this equals SINKDIALONEA. Now, you must subtract the letters in SOLE and K. When this is done you are left with INDIANA. Indiana is the Hoosier State, so the result checks with Clue No. 1.

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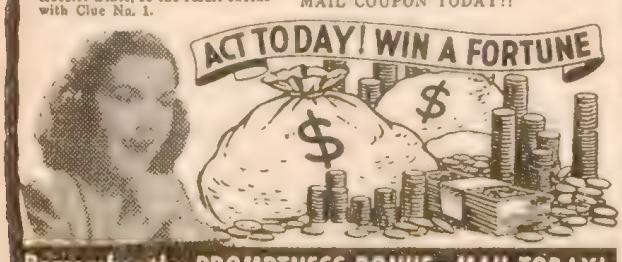

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With a bullet almost straight downward through his body, the tout collapsed.

INSTANTLY, the big crowd scattered into flying individuals. Down at the stud tables, men forgot their chips, but grabbed their hole cards and ran wildly for the doors. Up from the bar door came Doc Burnside, the crooked box in one hand, a Navy sixshooter in the other, the look of murder in his face and in his mouth the slogan of the town, "Damn him; don't let him git away." The gun of the lookout roared.

Half hidden in the blue reek of his fire, the marshal, with both guns drawn, waited back to the wall to take his medicine.

There was nobody near him now—nobody but Volney.

The granite-faced homesteader, at Chad's warning, had swept most of his gold into his pockets, and had drawn a knife. Then he lunged and grabbed the lookout's gun just as he saw it leveled at the marshal. The shot had gone wild and in the crash of the shot, Volney had knifed the lookout to the heart. then grabbed the gun. Now, armed with it, warily as a cat, his eyes ablaze, watching the approach of Burnside, whom he didn't know, he made his way toward Chad.

The touts, fleeing with the crowd toward the outer door, wheeled at the call of Burnside. With them rallied another dozen—the keepers of the games, and as they all rallied to their leader—two dozen of them—they drew their guns.

"For Gawd's sake," the marshal cried to the homesteader, "go to your woman. It's me they're after. You kin go; they'll leave you be."

"An' quit ye?" the homesteader's voice rang like brass and iron. "Hell! Not yit."

Waving the lookout's gun, in menace to the massed attack forming down

[*Turn To Page* 94]

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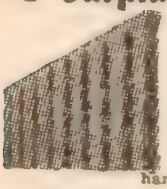

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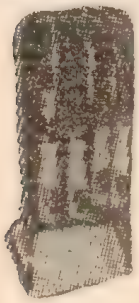

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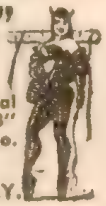

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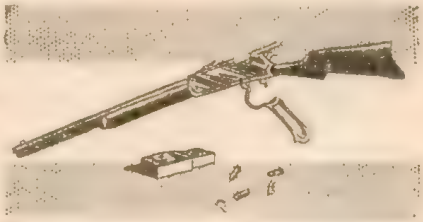
the hall, he came on to Chad.

Alone, the marshal hadn't dreamed of the last chance of fighting his way from the hall. He had meant to use every load in his two revolvers on Burnside and that gang. With the resolute homesteader at his side that was changed.

Suddenly flinging up one of his guns, he crashed the big chandelier above the layout with a shot.

That end of the hall filled with lamp smoke, then with darkness.

"Now into the thick of 'em." And, aiming carefully himself, he shot Doc Burnside down, while Volney, obeying orders, emptied his weapon at the distant crowd.



The touts were used to fighting. Firing, they came on. After them came the less resolute keepers of the games. But darkness concealed the marshal and the homesteader except when the marshal's guns spat fire.

"Great Gawd, feller," Chad pleaded, "yore gun is empty. You must go."

The homesteader ran to the body of Watson, salvaged two guns from it, and began again to shoot.

The attack halted. From the crowd a cool voice called, "Hell, let 'em empty their guns. They're nigh empty now. Then take 'em any way ye want 'em."

"We're done," said the marshal calmly. "Too bad you didn't go."

But in that instant those five Anchor punchers who had been waiting outside for Chad found a way, at last, to enter. The surging crowd had gotten through the doors. Those boys had heard the shooting and they had heard what the shooting was about.

[*Turn To Page* 96]

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Tall Higgins, leading the five, swept in. He yelled like a demon, "Stay with em, marshal. We're comin'. All the Anchors. Fifty strong."

The touts broke and ran. They ran for the bar door.

Chad and Volney also broke and ran. They joined the five Anchors who, after all, were just as good as fifty and they gained the street with no opposition.

In the outer darkness, they were not long skirting out behind the buildings and getting down toward the mover's camp and Volney's wagon while the street echoed from one end to the other with the cries of gamblers shouting what was to be done to Chad.

Volney and the punchers, though brave men, were half scared to death for Chad. They insisted that as soon as they got to Volney's wagon they all go out to the Anchor's camp where Chad would be safe.

But Chad wasn't at all alarmed. He did, however, stay that night at Volney's wagon, talking to Volney's wife and Volney's oldest boy, while the other men stood guard.

When morning came, Crook Burns came waddling out to the camp alone. Coming up to Volney's wagon, Crook grinned at Chad and said, "You are one helluva feller, Chad. I'm half notion to let 'em have you. But seein' you killed Doc, an' made me mayor o' the town, an' that I need a strong shootin' feller to keep order, I reckon I'll have to keep you for a spell."

Then Chad's hard blue eyes filled with a glint which suggested laughter. It had been his thought that the affair might turn this way.

With the "'Bye, mister, goodbye" of the Volney youngsters ringing in his ears, he sauntered back to town with Crook to resume his regular duties as watchdog of the wolves.

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THE TRESPASSER

(continued from page 74)

burned out ranch and a few thirsty, half-starved cattle.

"When I bought this ranch two years ago the valley was green, and my tanks were full of water. I was doing fine. I even bought more land to enlarge my ranch. And then the drouth set in.

"I would have given up long ago if it hadn't been for Aunt Liz. I could get a job on a ranch farther east, but she's old, and has no place to go. Still, a man can't fight the drouth forever, Ellie. I'll have to sell the Bar S for whatever I can get."

"But the drouth will break some day, won't it, Len?"

"Yes," he said, a note of bitterness creeping into his voice. "It will break. Probably the day after I abandon the Bar S and hit the trail to nowhere."

"Then it's simple, Len. Hold on one more day."

His faint, knowing smile spread across his face. "You're a nice girl, Ellie. The nicest I ever knew. You've got plenty of spunk and courage. I wish you the very best of everything. Stay here as long as you want, and help yourself to the water as long as there is any. And I hope you find your gold."

He mounted and turned back down the hill, galloping as though all the Furies of Hades were chasing him.

"I hope I find it too," she whispered moist-eyed. "For your sake, Len, darling."

BY MID-AFTERNOON Ellie couldn't resist the temptation to walk up to the mine shaft. She wouldn't go inside, only a little way.

She was back at the cabin even sooner than she expected.

She gathered up her meager possessions, led the horse to the door, and strapped them behind her saddle.

She would go to the Bar S and tell Len goodbye, thank him for letting her stay. Then she would ride to Sandstone and try to find work in the cafe there. Failing in that, she would have to go back to Frontizera—marry Lige Peavy, she guessed.

She gave one quick glance backward as she rode down the hill. "Goodbye, Grandpa," she said softly. "It was a nice dream, and I'm not sorry."

Len was down at the corral when she turned in at the Bar S. Her heart did a few rapid cartwheels as he came toward her with long, easy stride, sunlight glinting on the russet tan of his fine, strong features.

His mouth widened into a pleased grin—until he saw the bundles strapped behind her saddle.

"Ellie! You're leaving! I thought you'd stay, at least a few days."

Disappointment was written all over him, and Ellie's breath caught in a choking little sob. "There's no reason now. I went up to the tunnel a while ago and it was full of water, even running down the hill. I can't—"

His strong hands gripped her waist and lifted her from the saddle. "Water! Did you say water, Ellie!" He pulled her up against him and held her so tightly she could scarcely breathe. "Don't you see, Ellie? When we set off that dynamite charge, the explosion released an underground stream of water! We'll have water! We'll run the water down the hill into our tanks. Our valley will be green again. Oh Ellie, will you marry me?"

"Yes, Len," she said as soon as she could catch her breath. "I guess we found Grandpa's gold, even if we didn't know the rules."

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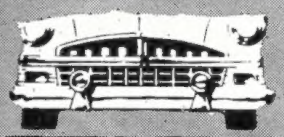

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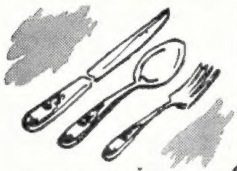

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